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FALL 1975/NUMBER FOUR

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GAY LITERATURE

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THE SECRET LOVER

by Jack Burris

It was the season of the hyacinth. As usual, David had overdone the planting, placing bed after bed of the plants about the cabin, patio, and even the woods, until now, blooming, they filled the air with their perfume, almost too-sweet, almost smothering in their combined odors. The bulbs had been separated and replanted according to color, so that now his usually-green landscape had blankets of reds, pinks, mauve and ten different shades of blue — every blue from the pale of over-washed jeans to the deep blue nextdoor-to-purple to that blue of porcelain (and the flowers looked as though they were porcelain, too, with that sheen. Porcelain phallic symbols created by Greek artists.) — until now the view from his window reminded him of gay, careless picknickers who had forgotten their tablecloths in the fright of a storm.

He had spent the morning weeding the various beds of color, and now, in mid-afternoon, the odor was still with him, burned into his nostrils and mind so that even in the kitchen, cooking cabbage for a late lunch, he still could realize only the flowers. He liked the hyacinth better than other flowers — except, possibly, wild flowers, with the joy of discovery and variety they bring — partially, he admitted, because of their legend. *Hyacinthus, the son of the Spartan king, Amyclas, was the beloved of Apollo. But love contains hatejealousyapathyfrustrationdeath (In equal parts?) and Apollo just had to play quoits (What in the hell are quoits, anyway? Sounds like something those dirtyqueerCommieforeignGreeks would play!) and so the discus became a weapon of death (Can't you just imagine some beautiful boy today getting killed by a Frisbee?) Narcissus became a flower, so why shouldn't Hyacinthus? Why shouldn't we all, come to think of it? That would be nice, to have a flower named after you. Don't mourn me, name me a flower. Something living and beautiful. Reincarnation in the form of beauty, immortality in a perfume. (I'd probably end up a stinkweed!)*

He considered the larder, wondering what else he might fix for his lunch. Unfortunately, he knew that he shouldn't fix anything else, for he had always had a problem with his weight (or at least he had had ever since he passed thirty, which made it seem like always.) Of course, after years of frustration he realized that there was a pattern to his fatness. He only got fat when he needed to protect himself from the world. In short, he got fat mainly when he wrote, for it was then

that he had to be isolated, and fatness was a sure way of doing it. But afterwards, after he could come out into the world again, he always managed to lose the excess. Yet he had learned, in time, that it was easier to avoid that excess in the first place. He decided to eat plain cabbage. If he put in a little work that afternoon, he would treat himself to ice cream for dinner.

Goddeux, his dog, wanted in, so he held open the screen. A Scotch Terrier, the dog was covered with burrs and dirt, but he refused to hassle him about a bath until later. The dog was getting old -- like he was -- and thus demanded and deserved a certain respect and dignity.

He ate the meal without relishing it, smoked a cigarette, then lit up a joint. When he heard a car starting up the hill, he put the joint out, forgetting -- or perhaps not ever really believing -- that marijuana was now legal. But he would have put it out anyway, for to him it was a sign of weakness to be smoking pot in mid-afternoon. Goddeux heard the car, too, and growled, but he was too old and too tired to give further interest -- yet. David couldn't imagine who it would be. Gene, who still worked in Stockton but who had a cabin further down the hill, couldn't be expected until the weekend, at the earliest -- unless something had happened. Dick, the last time he had phoned, was undertaking a new lover, which meant that Dick would be out of the picture for at least a month -- unless something had happened. The car was stopped at the gate now, and there were sounds of someone opening the iron bar (Why hadn't he locked it? Then he would have known) and then the car door slamming and the motor whining anew as it crept up the steep, winding road.

An admirer, perhaps?

There had been admirers, before. After the first few volumes of The Novel were published, the admirers had come, a few even risking the steepness of the hill to see him: to ask him, to beg him, to plead with him, to argue his work, to idolize, and, fortunately, a few even to fuck. But once The Novel was finished, so was the admiration, the profit, the success. When the sixteen books were finished, he was, too, as far as admirers were concerned. The Greatest Writer of All Time was forgotten, left to die alone in his cabin in Sebastopol, California.

God, dig Mary Tragedy!

And yet there was some real tragedy there, a tragedy of failure. He had tried to write a beautiful, truthful novel in the hopes that someone would see that, in spite of his ugly physical looks, he was beautiful, and that the looks were actually a part of his beauty, for out of ugliness he had managed to create beauty, and how much closer to a god can you get than that? But the world had accepted the creation without accepting the creator, until finally, in frustration, he wished he'd never wasted his live on writing at all. *I dropped my trousers to expose myself to the world -- my cock, my physical and spiritual being, my pink hyacinth of a soul*

— and the world looked and commented, "My, you do have rather a small one, don't you?" All right, so to hell with that world. He didn't have anything else to say to them anyway.

So why are they bothering me? What do they want?

The car stopped outside. Goddeux rose reluctantly, actually getting up and going to the door.

Why don't you leave me alone? Doesn't a man have the right to rest, to rehearse death before he has to act it? He had worked hard, all of his life. Didn't he have the right to retire? He had the money. And he had already said everything he wanted to say, damn it!

The knock was loud, insisting rather than asking. Goddeux remembered how to bark, but he was rusty. David moved to the door, acting through trained obedience rather than desire, but opening the door all the same, to the demand, to the hand, to the man who stood there on his porch with a large box in his arms and a grin on his lips that said, "Well, it's about time, you son-of-a-bitch!"

David felt a chill of threat along with the afternoon wind. The man, whoever he was, was going to intrude upon his life, and there was not going to be anything he could do about it.

But all I want is rest!

"David Burns?"

"Yes."

Why are you so goddamn handsome? Why, at the very least, couldn't you be homely so that I'd at least have a chance to refuse? You could have been sexy. I wouldn't have minded that. That nerve ending's dead now anyway. But why handsome?

"May I come in?"

"Is there a reason?"

"Yes," the stranger said. "There is a reason."

"And if I refuse?"

"I'll have to wait outside until you change your mind."

"It might be a long wait."

"I'm young," he said, an obvious truth. "I don't mind investing a little time, if there's a reason."

"And I'm not going to find out what that reason is until I let you in. Right?"

"Right!"

"Then I suppose I might as well let you in."

David moved aside. The man entered, looked around at the cabin, then set the large box down in front of the chair David had recently vacated. Goddeux had tricked himself into believing he was a puppy again, and was jumping up against the man's legs. David didn't bother to correct the dog. Intruders were not guests.

He relit the joint he'd been carrying. He didn't bother offering it to the other man. He wanted him to state his reason and then leave. He was not about to share a dream with him!

"First of all, do you mind if I pull your curtains shut? I don't want anyone to see me here."

"Why? What am I now, the local house of ill repute?"

"I don't know, I'm not a local."

The man moved from window to win-

dow, pulling the drapes shut, then going to the wall switches, turning off the lights that David had turned on earlier because of the overcast. One by one, until the brightness had disappeared and there was only one light left and they seemed to be caught in a basement, or a cell.

"You're wasting your time, you know. It's a mile down to the road."

"I'd rather be safe than sorry."

Is he going to kill me? Rob me? Rape me? (Oh, don't you wish!) What, then? What the hell is he doing, coming in here and ruining my peace? He has no right to do this!

"Who are you, anyway?"

"Byron."

"Just Byron? No last name?"

"Maybe that's for you to fill in. Why don't you open your presents?"

"Presents?"

"Yes. Those there in the box."

"But why are you giving me presents? First you demand entrance with your knocking, then you try to bribe me. Aren't you afraid you're being too subtle?"

"I don't have time to be subtle," Byron said.

"Oh? Why not? I thought you said just a moment ago that you were young and had lots of time."

"Time to wait, if I have to, but not time to waste."

"And subtlety would be wasted on me?"

"At first, yes. You didn't want to let me in. You use trick openings in some of your stories. Why shouldn't I use one, too?"

"And this . . ." David moved his hand to indicate the box of presents, then the man himself. ". . . this is just a story?"

"You are pretty far gone, aren't you? I wouldn't have imagined that you would ever use the word 'just' in talking about a story."

"I hate stories. I've wasted my life on them!"

"No, you haven't."

"I said everything I had to say, every word of truth that I know."

"I know. I read them. All of them. The Novel, and the others, besides."

"Where? Did some stupid English teacher decide that my soul would make a nice weekend assignment?"

"I read them at the prison library. I was doing time, so I had plenty of time for reading. Even a prolific old bastard like you. After I read them I decided I wanted to see you, so I escaped and came here. That car outside is stolen, so we'll have to hide it. Now isn't that enough about me, at least until you can open your presents?"

"Why were you in prison?"

"I murdered a man."

"Manslaughter?"

"No, first degree."

"But why?"

"I made a movie that was too truthful. He happened to be the actor in it, and he couldn't stand that truth, so he destroyed the film. And so I destroyed him."

"I'm too old to meet a murderer now."

"Wouldn't you have done the same, if he'd destroyed The Novel?"

"I wasn't judging you. I only said that I'm too old for this."

Byron nodded. "You may be. I don't know yet. I had to take that chance."

David sat back down in his chair and inhaled the last puffs of smoke from the joint. Maybe, if he got high enough, Byron would just go away. Maybe if he were to crash, Byron would be gone when he woke up again. Maybe if Byron saw that he really was too old, too deadened by pot and time and pain to respond, then he would walk back out the door and the whole incident would amount to nothing more than a footnote in some future candidate's doctorate.

"Why don't you open the presents?"

"Presents! Bribes, you mean. What are you trying to prove with presents?"

"That I did read The Novel, for one thing, and that I understood it."

"Your gifts for the god, huh? All right. And what favors do you expect the god to grant in return?"

"Help me make another movie."

"Help you make another movie? Ha! As if I could. Why don't you make another movie by yourself? Why do you need my help?"

"The first movie was me. I can't do that over again. And you're the only other person I've ever known who might be worth the effort."

"I'm not! Believe me, I'm not!"

"I suppose I'll have to find that out for myself, won't I?"

"But I don't want to make a movie. All I want to do is rest."

"Not really. Or you wouldn't have opened that door."

"I opened that door because you knocked!"

"And I knocked because I want you to help me make a movie."

David sighed his last ounce of protest out, then leaned forward to open the box of presents. It was a plain cardboard box he opened, and the presents inside weren't wrapped, either. He pulled out a heart-shaped rock first, and smiled, remembering again that tramp from childhood. There was a toy koala, a handmade ring with arrows and moon stamped into the silver, a bottle of Champale, even half of a cherry candybar. He did not look at the rest. It was all there, he was certain, all the symbols of his stories which actually were the symbols of his life. Byron had been thorough, anyway.

"I am very tired," David, irritated that his voice betrayed a note of pleading. "Would you mind if I took a nap right now, and then talked with you more this evening?"

"No, I wouldn't mind at all. Not as long as I can have this evening."

"There are woods to walk in. Goddeux will walk with you if you want company."

"Thank you. Could you, perhaps, unlock the door so that I might get back in?"

"It's not locked," David said. "It never has been."

Byron smiled. "Perhaps I should lock it, when I come back in."

"If you wish. Although it seems to me that the horse is already stolen."

Byron shrugged. "So why let the rustler be stolen, too?"

David stood up again, moving heavily toward the bedroom door. "You can wake me up in two hours, if you like."

"All right. I'll have some hot tea waiting for you. Still two teaspoons of sugar?"

David stopped, turned around to look at the man again. "Are you certain we've never met before?"

"Only in your Novel."

"Oh. I keep forgetting about that."

"You can afford to. It's finished."

"And your film will be finished, too, Mr. . . . Byron. It may literally be over my dead body, but I have a feeling that it will be finished."

Byron smiled back at him, his look open and direct. "I do, too."

He was not certain if he slept, or if the pot had merely permitted him to float in a daydream for two hours, but when he heard the knock on his bedroom door, his eyes were instantly open, ready. He remembered that he had a murderer in the house, ready to serve him tea. Well, if he were going to kill him, wouldn't he have already done it? Again that knock, persistent as a hungry woodpecker.

"Yes? I'm awake."

"Do you want your tea in there, or in here?"

"I'm not an invalid, Mr. Byron. Nor am I getting senile!"

"I take it that means you're getting up."

"You take it correctly, Mr. Byron. I'm getting up."

Only why am I getting up? Why am I so anxious to go into that room and listen for hours while he dribbles on and on about some fucking movie? I'm too old to make movies. I learned to play the piano when I was thirty-six. That was my last new endeavor — I promised myself that at the time. "All you have to do is learn to play the piano, David. That's all. Then you can rest for the rest of your life." I'm forty-six years old. I've published sixteen books plus one text and I'm tired. So why should I become a movie maker at my age? Why can't I just stay here and rest, like I want to do?

But he stood up, wobbling for a moment on the unused legs, then slowly straightening, like a plant that's finally been watered. He would have to get high again, before he tried to listen, to resist the man's temptation. He could still find the words to refute, but he would have to get high first.

He opened the door. The man was in the living room. The sun must have set, for there was no glare behind the pulled curtains. He did not know what time it was, didn't care. When he had returned, he had exchanged clock time for season.

"Here's your tea. I hope it's sweet enough."

David grunted, then got another joint from the holder on the table before he sat down. He sipped the tea, which was too hot yet to drink, and then lit the joint. The first whiffs of smoke jarred his mind into alertness, and he was ready for the battle.

"Why do you want to make a movie?"

"Because I don't know how to write."

"Why don't you learn how?"

"I don't have your talent."

"Talent! Shit. You mean you're too lazy."

Byron shrugged. Somehow, during the last two hours, he had found new clothes to wear. The opened plaid shirt he was wearing now suited him better. "Call it what you will."

"Why do you have to include me?"

"I'm not including you. The picture is you."

"I don't want it."

"I don't think that really matters, does it?"

"What makes you think you have the right to come in here, force me into making a movie, draining away what little time I have left . . ."

"You've had your novel. Why shouldn't I have my movie?"

"Have your movie! Take it and shove it! Why me?"

"Because you're the only one who's capable of understanding why I have to do it."

"It's insane!"

"I imagine that's what people told you when you said you were going to write sixteen novels which was really one novel."

David sipped the tea, staring over the rim of the cup at this man, this stranger who wanted something more than he did not want it, and which he already knew he was going to submit to, body and soul. He could not retire. Not really. He had been dead for seven years now, ever since the last of The Novel was published. Like Lazarus, he was ready to return from the dead. But not without a struggle.

"In other words you want to pick my brain, to ride on my coattails into glory."

"You said that you've already said everything, so why should you object if I want to make use of what's left? Isn't that better than just letting it go to waste?"

"There's nothing left!"

"There's something. It's sleeping, but your mind's not dead, so it can be awakened yet."

"You're a vulture, picking at my dead flesh . . ."

"Or an artist, using whatever materials he can find."

"Leftovers!"

"Whatever. They will serve my purposes."

David sighed, finishing the last of the tea and inhaling deeply on the roach of the joint. He was defeated, he knew. You could not waste truth. If he wasn't going to use it, then he had no right to deny it to Byron. "I suppose you have everything you need."

"Yes, in the car. Which, incidently, I took the liberty of parking in your garage."

"I suppose you stole the cameras, too."

"Where else would I get them. Prisoners of the state do not receive cameras for Christmas."

"I'll give you two days."

"Thank you."

David hesitated, surprised that there

was no objection. He put out the joint and lit a cigarette. "Will that be long enough?"

"It'll have to be, won't it? If that's all you're giving me."

"I don't have much time. I . . ."

"I know, you want to rest. All right, two days it is. Can we start tonight?"

"No! No, not until tomorrow."

"All right."

David put out the cigarette. "What am I expected to do?"

"Just be yourself."

"Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man."

"Why not? Someday people will want to know what you did in those last years, after the zenith was passed."

"Yes, I can see the lines already forming."

"There are more than you realize. You're still being read."

"Then they must all be reading the same copy, because the royalties haven't increased any."

"Are you short on money?"

"Are you going to steal some for me?"

"If you need it."

"No. No, I don't need it. All that I really need is rest."

"You'll get it again in two days, after I'm gone."

"I wonder," David said. "I wonder if I'll ever rest again."

"You said, once, in *Charisma,* I think, that there would be time enough to rest when you died."

"I was your age then. I'm my age now."

"You're only forty-six."

"Only."

"The glass is either half-full, or half-empty. To me it looks half-full. Would you like for me to prepare dinner now?"

"Do you know how to cook?"

"Yes, very well."

"I think there's some meat in the ice box. Make enough for the dog, too."

"All right." The young man stood up, moved to the kitchen door, but again hesitated. "Is there anything you need, for now?"

"Just rest."

Byron smiled, then gave a half-salute with his hand. "It'll be at least an hour before dinner's ready. Enjoy yourself."

The dinner was delicious, David had to admit. Steaks broiled and covered with mushrooms, a huge salad of mixed greens, highly-seasoned rice, and chilled tomatoes. There was enough, without being excessive. Goddeux ate noisily from his dish by the door. The sun was setting outside, but Byron had the curtains drawn anyway, so their only relief from the darkness was the candles on the table. Outside in the trees the birds were discussing their day, perhaps bragging a bit on who had found the biggest worm.

David didn't feel like talking. The food tasted too good. He finished the steak first, enjoying it the most, and then began working on the salad. He would not be able to eat like that every night, or he would soon be overweight again. But it had been a long time, so perhaps this once wouldn't hurt him any.

Even when he finished eating, he did not feel like talking, even though he knew there were matters to be discussed. He lit a cigarette instead and sat looking at Byron, who looked back from his side of the table with unblinking frankness. David studied the man's face. It was lean and hard, with a slight scar about an inch long on the right cheek. The dark hair had a slight kink to it, a subtle suggestion of mysterious forefathers. The grey eyes were the most compelling feature, and when he looked into them he kept remembering that stupid cliché about eyes being the windows to the soul. If that were true, Byron evidently had a very clear, untroubled soul.

"Do you think you'd recognize me now in a lineup?"

"Where did you get the scar?"

"From a fight."

"You must be a very violent man."

"There are things I will fight to protect, if that's what you mean."

"What's the point of this movie of yours?"

"Are you still afraid of art without noble purpose? It's a movie. It will exist because I create it. Isn't that point enough?"

"At your age, perhaps," David said. "But at my age time in any form is too precious to waste."

"You were wasting it when I came."

"No! No, I was resting. There's nothing wrong with resting. I earned it."

"No, there's nothing wrong with resting," Byron agreed. "But what's the point of it?"

David smiled, trapped. "All right, you've made your point. Rather pointedly, I must admit. So I'll ask another question instead. What do you want from me? What, exactly, do you expect me to do?"

"I want to capture your fantasy. I want to explore you, all aspects of you, and I can do it best through your fantasy."

"Then you expect me to write my fantasy out, to work up a script of . . ."

"No," Byron said. "No script. I merely want you to play-act again. Don't you remember? In your book you told how you used to play 'dress-up' back in Kansas. I want you to play dress-up again. Like you are now, a man. Don't you see, it'll be a completion of the cycle for you, if nothing else. Your fantasy will be in being a child again. And, as a child again, you'll fantasize even more. That's what I want to photograph, to capture. I'll show you, your body and face and actions as you go through the fantasy, then I'll superimpose that over the scene you are imagining."

"Then in the scene I'm imagining I'll imagine another scene in which I imagine."

"Right! Chinese boxes, one within another, forever getting smaller. Right."

"Well, it's an interesting enough concept," David admitted. "But I don't see how you're going to carry it off. Not in a movie."

"Watch me!"

"It can't be done. Not without utter confusion. Do you think your audience will be able to follow?"

"I don't have an audience. I'm making a film. If the film is good enough someone will understand it."

"Idealistic youth!"

"There's nothing wrong with being idealistic. We become our own gods, remember? I think I can make a movie showing various levels of fantasy working at the same time. Now what's wrong with my giving it a try?"

"Nothing," David said, apologizing with his tone. "I'll help you, in every way I can."

"All that you have to do is play-act. Dress up in old clothes, just as you did when you were seven and eight, and then play-act, the same way you did then. I'll photograph it. Later on I'll photograph the internal fantasies. Then I'll put the two together."

"Should I let you know what it is I'm fantasizing?"

"No. You just concentrate on play-acting. I'll know what you are imagining from your actions and dialogue. Frankly, the hardest part will probably be getting you used to the camera, so that you won't act into it."

"It might work," David said. "A lot would depend upon how well you could capture the fantasy. I assume that you're going to use actors there."

"Yes. Or at least people who can act."

"What if the fantasy becomes highly sexual?"

"What if it does?"

"Well . . . are you going to be able to show a small boy having sex with a man, for example?"

Byron smiled. "I thought I was out of touch, being in prison, but I think you've been in prison longer than I. You obviously haven't seen too many movies lately. Anything you can imagine, I can photograph, okay?"

"It's okay with me, but I bet those fucking Catholics are spinning in their graves."

"Maybe that's what makes the world go around," Byron said, chuckling.

"Like little squirrels in wire cages. . ."

There was a silence then, while they looked at each other across the littered table. David lit another cigarette, wishing that it were a joint instead, but too lazy to go after a joint, which was all the way in the next room. Byron was still smiling, looking straight into his eyes as though the joke were there. I feel good. David thought, a little surprised. *I feel . . . alive! And content! And . . . justified!*

"Will you be ready to start in the morning?"

"Yes," David agreed. Now that he understood the idea, he was anxious to begin, too. "What time?"

"Around ten. The light should be good then, and the air should be fairly warm."

"All right." He inhaled deeply on the cigarette, watching the smoke curl. "I assume you're staying here tonight."

"Yes. In fact I'm staying here until the movie's finished."

"There may be problems. People do come up here sometimes, you know. Friends. People on business. My family, occasionally."

"We can keep the gate locked. That way they'll have to honk. That will be my signal to disappear for a while. I just hope you don't have many overnight guests.

I'll leave my sleeping bag outside, just in case."

"No, there aren't any overnight guests. Except maybe Gene, and he has his own cabin, down below."

"Then I don't see any problems. I mean in terms of intrusion."

"No, there shouldn't be too many problems there. I'm not exactly the most popular man in the United States."

"You didn't set out to be. You wanted to be an artist, remember."

"I remember. I only wonder why."

"You mean, what's the point?"

"I suppose. Why do I keep looking for the point. I thought I had accepted the fact that life is pointless long ago."

"You're the artist. You create the point."

"I would like to be more like you," David said softly. "More accepting . . ."

"But in reality, what will happen is that I'll become more like you. More . . . selective."

"Is that what I am? Selective? I suppose it's because there's not enough time."

"There's never enough time," Byron agreed.

"If we got up early, we could probably get started by eight thirty or nine. The light's not bad, then."

"Good."

"You'll have to keep reminding me that it's your film."

"I think you'll be too busy to think much about external details."

David sighed, snuffing out the cigarette. "Well, I suppose I should go to bed, if I'm going to get up that early."

"It's only a little after eight."

"I know, but I want to lay awake for a while, to think. At least you've given me something to think about."

"Thank you."

"You'll find bedding and everything else you need in the other bedroom. But I guess I don't have to tell you to make yourself at home. You already have."

"Do you mind?"

"No, not really."

David stood up. Byron rose, too. The two men looked at each other across the table, and then, without comment, they reached across and shook hands. David felt himself smiling like a goosed schoolgirl, but he didn't care. He would have to take pills tonight in order to sleep, he knew. The day had been too full to digest quickly. Already thinking ahead, David walked up the stairs to his bedroom.

The sleeping pills had not worked. He had watched the moon-light flow down the window and across the room. He had heard the noises of Byron going to bed, owl answering owl, Goddeux whining in his sleep, the creaking of a chariot on the other side of the world. He had remembered a thousand minor incidents -- people met once, moments of small triumph, problems which had never been solved, the one real lover he had never had, bits of the pleasures he had received from the lovers he had had, the days when the teaching went well -- but not one of them was important enough to entertain him

tonight. He had smoked almost a pack of cigarettes already, but he lit another one, hating the taste of the smoke with first drag, but determined to smoke it all, nevertheless.

Turning on the nightstand light, he searched on the shelves behind him for something to read. Usually mysteries and pornography relaxed him enough, and he kept himself supplied, but none of the books tempted him, so he turned out the light and lay back down. He took another drag on the cigarette, put it out even though it was only half-way down, and then reached beneath the covers to finger his cock. He could masturbate himself to sleep, he knew; it was an old trick, but it still worked.

He tried to bring to mind some stimulus, some memory of passion to be re-enacted anew, some instant replay to inspire another play. It had to be exactly right, some moment of special pleasure, and he quickly rejected the first few that came. Then he remembered an instant, one day when he was still teaching at CSM, and the boy. It offered brevity, mystery, beauty, and plenty of gaps to be filled in by imagination. He chose it.

Old muscle hardens slowly, even when knowing hands touch worn sports of sensation. It was the boy's side that he had fallen in love with that day, the left side near the lower stomach. It was a late day in Indian Summer, the leaves not yet frost-dyed and with enough sun left over from summer to heat up the afternoon. He had been in his office working on Roll Sheets when the boy knocked and then entered, wanting to see his officemate, Paul. He had told the boy that Paul wasn't in, that he didn't know when to expect him, but the boy had lingered. David had studied him then, seeing the scraggly attempt at a beard, the hairless chest with one white pimple gleaming on it like an imbedded pearl, the stomach lean and hard. The shirt was there, but unbuttoned, still hiding the sides, though. The boy had a bow and some arrows in a quiver strapped to his back. He was the hunter, the Jack who hunts from sheer lust, the William Tell who actually loved archery more than his son, the young Greek resting a moment from his sports. He smelled of sweat, of running, of leaves smoking in lazy wind. He said he needed Paul's signature in order to drop a class. *I promised to get the signature if he would leave the form. He agreed, and handed me a piece of paper complete with four carbons. Then he stood there a moment with his left hand resting on his hip, the curtain of a shirt drawn back to reveal the play of light upon tanned muscle, tapering down to the promise of a groin hidden beneath shorts and trousers. I tried to study the paper form while all the time I imagined kissing that side, that flesh still warm from the sun, that young body that promised a new experience by its very inexperience.* He turned, the curtain dropped, and he walked away.

David lay still a moment, thinking he had heard a noise. He had forgotten about his guest, and forgotten to consider the possibility that Byron might be disturbed by his movements of masturbation. But

there was no sound that he could distinguish, so he went back to his remembered boy. Then Byron came into the room.

He watched the man's body move in lightness, then shadow as it crossed the floor to him. Byron pulled back the blankets, exposing his nudity and hardness, but David didn't mind because he could see it was mutual. Then the hands touched his body -- like ghost hands, they were, light and gentle -- and he shivered partially from chill, and then he closed his eyes and opened his body for the ascension.

The warmth of sun he felt in the warmth of the body. Hot sun in late August. And there was a smell of animal, a smell of that perfume of sweat men make in anticipation, and a smell of a man's face who has been outdoors all day, every day. There was the sound of breaths clashing together at close range, the faint squeak of a bed. The owls were silent, and the others, as though they were all waiting. There was weight pressing down upon him, firm weight, not heavy. Then lips touched his, the tongue knocking.

. . . the stranger came inside, touching his way about the cave, exploring . . . rough hands rubbing nipple, pleasingly irritating . . . his tongue on cheek . . . worn fingers pressing, insisting . . . as smooth as apple skin . . . sun-warmed apples in September . . . grey horses quivering away imaginary flies . . . tangerines eaten in sunlight . . . walks in wet woods . . . the faint odor of cigarette . . . hot coffee beginning to perk . . . the flow of water over a moss-covered rock . . . a peach with the fuzz washed off . . . running, in spring, barefooted and mind-nude . . . fireflies in a blue-glass bottle . . . a half-dozen skyrockets fired in succession, bam bam bam bam bam . . . two boys wrestling, equally matched . . . mornings hot by ten . . . woods in summer, at dusk . . . a fly crawling across your groin . . . running in summer, to catch a firefly . . . a mouth sliding over the head, down the base . . . waiting for the mailman when you know you're getting a special letter . . . telling someone who's listening . . . a whole sun-warmed plum in your mouth . . . hardness petrified . . . fingers pleading passion . . . tongue lips mouth love . . . the taste of the smell of soap . . . driving a Porsche too fast down a mountain road . . . opening a gift from someone who knows . . . touching an electric fence while holding hands . . . "I love you" in action not just words . . . sixty-nine anytime . . . swallow nibble suck bite pull . . . fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck-fuckfuckfuckfuck . . . cock man father love die . . . bite pull swallow . . . the first warning of pain behind the nose . . . copper pennies for a woman . . . sucking in air for a man . . . push draw push push draw push . . . sliding slippery snuggle snow . . . a sharp turn brakes squealing . . . trees flying past . . . a merry-go-round without brakes . . . your father throwing you up into the air and catching you . . . stopping for breath before your heart explodes . . . the Porsche flying through air . . . ram break pull ram break . . . swallow take . . . tree . . . aimed

at a tree, no stopping now . . . ram ram ram ram

HIT!

E X P L O D E !

When David came back from the bathroom, Byron was gone. He wished he had stayed, for he would have enjoyed spending the night with him, but at the same time he was happy for the aloneness. He planned to lie in bed thinking, but as soon as he got under the blankets and the warmth re-enveloped him, he thought only of sleep. He heard the noise of owls, cooing contentedly, and the faint sound of Byron's breathing in the next room. Goddeux downstairs wasn't sure he'd remembered to circle three times, so he did it again, half-heartedly . . . The moonlight was gone from the window now, passed on. The creaking of the chariot was drawing nearer. He was tired, sleepy, satisfied. He had had his moment of pleasure, but, what was even better, there might be more of the same in the coming tomorrow. He sighed, pulled his eyelids shut tight, and slept.

David cursed the alarm before he remembered, and then he swung out of bed and shut it off. Byron was already up, he knew, and in a moment he heard the noises of coffee being made in the kitchen below. He remembered mornings in his childhood, waking up to find his mother cooking breakfast in the kitchen below, the smell of food coaxing him into action. He dressed hurriedly, not wanting to miss a moment of what the day had to offer.

"Good morning," Byron said when he came downstairs, and David waited, somehow expecting more, some symbol of what had passed between them during the darkness of night, but Byron only smiled.

Well, it's his game, so I suppose we have to play it his way.

"Good morning. It looks like you're going to have good weather for your shooting."

Byron winked. "Arranged it that way."

The breakfast was ready, still steaming in the heated plates. David was amused at Byron's timing, knowing that such perfect working out of small details usually came only after years of effort. And then he saw the pork. Fresh tenderloin! He almost couldn't believe it.

"Where did you get the tenderloin?"

"Had to order it special, from the butcher."

"Must've cost you enough!"

"I'll write it off as part of my movie expenses," Byron said. "Assuming, of course, that I ever fill out an income tax form."

David sat down at the table and began eating. The biscuits were light and high, like his mother's used to be. The pork while not quite as good as he remembered — but then it wasn't quite as fresh, either -- was still the first and therefore the best he had eaten in forty years. It was as though those forty years hadn't existed. He felt young again, fresh, cleansed. He was a child of six, eating his breakfast in Kansas before he went out to play "dress-up." He wondered if Byron had deliberately set out to give

him that mood. He looked across the table at his friend, who was carefully wiping a bit of egg from his face.

"Why do you want to make this movie, anyway?"

"I told you that yesterday."

"But it doesn't make sense! You're risking your life, your freedom, everything!"

"Didn't you, with The Novel?"

"Yes, and it wasn't worth it! Can you understand what that means? You give your life to a dream, and it isn't worth it."

"Is that why you quit writing?"

"No. I only wrote for myself anyway, really. I quit because I didn't have anything else to say. I had said it all."

"All?"

"All that they had a right to. Besides, I was tired of the bargains I got. Everyone else was getting fat off my work, but I was stuck at the typewriter producing it. I figured that it was time that I got some enjoyment out of it, so I retired."

"And are you happy now, with the bargain you got."

"No. The only reward of retirement is rest, and I enjoy that only in spurts."

"So why don't you go back to writing?"

"Because they don't have enough money in the whole world to pay me for my work, my effort. And I refuse to do it without purpose."

"Write it for yourself again."

"No, I don't need it now. I'm beyond the point where any knowledge I might gain is too late to do me any real good."

"Then write it for me."

David's hand shook so badly he had to set the cup of tea back down. Nervously he reached for a cigarette from his pocket and lit it, even though he hadn't known he was finished with the food. But the smoke helped, the sucking-in served as a pacifier, and he managed to sip at the tea the second time.

"Why do you think you have the right to demand so much from me?"

"Didn't you say once in The Novel that your friends used to ask you the same question?"

"You answered that you never demanded more than what you're willing to give."

"Are you so sure that you're willing?"

"I'm here."

"But they don't want it, Byron! They're not ready for it. They take it and they don't understand it and so they tear it apart and use it for toilet paper. Cast not your pearls before swine . . ."

"All of them aren't swine."

"Too many are."

"And with an effort, Ulysses broke the spell of Circe, and the swine turned back into men again."

"I am not Ulysses."

"And I am not a swine," Byron said. "You about ready?"

"To write? No!"

"To make a movie. Today and tomorrow are my two days, remember. You can write again afterwards."

"Gee, that's great! Thanks for the permission."

"You're welcome. Come on, hurry up and finish your tea. You're wasting part

of my time, now, and I'm not ready to retire yet."

Byron had the camera ready, the sun was high enough to give good light, the creation of visual art was about to begin, and David still didn't have a single idea as to what the hell he was supposed to be doing, exactly. Was he supposed to act? He had given up his acting career in junior college, for Christ's sake. Why would he want to go back to it now? The only roles they would give him then were character parts, minor characters at that. No, he could not be a great actor, even for Byron. Or was it to be a documentary? Then, of course, his role would be simple enough: The Great American Writer. He knew that role; he'd played it many, many times before. The irony was, of course, that no one would ever be able to imagine him in the role. He had to admit himself that if he were casting it, he would not have chosen himself. He did not look like the great American writer. Which meant that he had to act the role all the stronger, to make people accept him in spite of his looks. Perhaps he had done more acting than he'd remembered.

"Are you ready?"

"No."

"Well we'd better get started anyway. So get ready."

"I don't even know what I'm supposed to do. You bring me out here in this dampness and leave me standing around for half an hour waiting while you play with your toy, and you don't even give me an idea as to what the hell you even want from me. You're probably the most selfish goddamn egotist I've ever met in my life! Your fucking movie! Your great art! Okay, it's yours! So why in the hell don't you leave me out of it? What do you want from me anyway? Why don't you think about me for once? You stupid motherfucking sonofabitch!"

There was no show of anger in Byron's face, no indication that the words were making any effect at all, and so David stopped, impotent before an enemy he would not pierce with his only weapons. Byron looked at his watch, then said, "You've wasted about five minutes now. The time you waste is deducted from your sleeping time, not my movie-making time. Don't you think we'd better start now?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"You're a creator of fantasy. I want you to create and act out a fantasy which I can photograph. You said in The Novel that you used to play dress-up. Okay I want you to play dress-up while I watch and record."

"I can't just . . ."

"Yes, you can," Byron interrupted. "You've done it before, so you know how. You'll just have to remember how. I've got some grass, if you want to use it to help you break through. There are some old clothes over there in that box if they will help. I believe that they were the only props you used before. Now, shall we begin?"

"But . . . but honestly, I don't know how to . . . to even start! It's been almost forty years since I did that."

"How did you start then?"

"Well, usually I'd go see a movie on Saturday night, and then for that week I'd just play that movie, over and over again, usually just about every major scene anyway, as I remember."

"Seen any good movies lately?"

"No, I haven't. Nor bad ones either."

"Can you remember any of the ones you saw then?"

" 'I Remember Mama'. I guess the main reason I remember that was that I'd read the book first. I was only about eight or nine then, but Peg had bought the book, and I started reading it, and Mama said I could, because it wasn't dirty. So when I saw the movie, it was like seeing it twice. Anyway, I played 'I Remember Mama' until it was running out my ears. I suppose part of the attraction was that I could identify. I thought of myself as a girl then, so I was like Katrina, I think her name was. She wanted to be a writer, and perhaps, even then, I had some premonition that I would become one. I thought that her Mama was like my Mom, too. Remember that scene where she got her graduation dress? My sister had just thrown away one of her dresses, and it was like a graduation dress. I remember it was green on top with puffed sleeves and skirt in a green-and-white stripe. I think it was cheap material. It felt as though it had been waxed. I would swipe some tiger lilies from my mother's garden to serve as the corsage. I would go to the graduation party and I would sing and dance. The bushes would be other couples to dance around, the trees were the walls to my palace, the sunlight filtering through the leaves my million candles. The whole world was mine then, and it was a beautiful world, a world of kindness and love and beauty. Oh, why did I ever have to grow up?"

"I don't think you did, fortunately," Byron said softly. "Anyway, that's what I want to capture on film. You ready now?"

"You . . ." But the right words did not come, so he shrugged instead. "Yes, I guess I am."

"Let's get started then."

They broke for lunch. While Byron cooked soup and made sandwiches in the kitchen, David sat at the table smoking a cigarette and thinking about the morning. He had not been bothered much by Byron's cold, absorbed passion during the shooting, for he had almost expected that, had perhaps even unconsciously predicted it, but he was still a bit numbed at Byron's treatment of him. For the last four hours he had been Byron's puppet, bent, folded, manipulated at Byron's will, without any consideration for the puppet whatever. Not once during the entire morning had Byron showed any indication of the past night and what had happened between them in the big bed together. Had it really ever happened? Had he, perhaps, imagined the whole thing? Was he getting senile at forty-six for Christ's sake? Goddeux rubbed against his legs, begging attention, so David leaned down to pet him. "I always spoil my dogs," he said aloud. "Your

father was just as spoiled as you are." *And I'm probably just as spoiled as my father was, which means that it was a damn good thing I only had dogs to spoil and not children. What did I expect from Byron, anyway? Love?* Did that word have any meaning left for him anymore? And yet it was love that he expected. And at his age! The whole idea was preposterous. Of course Byron was using him. That was the whole point, wasn't it? And he was paying for the use by giving sex and kitchen service and whatever else he had to offer. But not love. Love is one price that can't be paid for the service of use.

"You looked tired," Byron said, bringing in a plate of sandwiches. "You going to be able to make it this afternoon?"

"I'll make it! I'm not that old yet."

"Good."

And he went back into the kitchen again.

"Good. So now I can use you the rest of the afternoon. Now we can play cowboys and Indians and you'll be my horse and carry me over the whole fucking country. Good, because now I can finish my movie on time even if you croak in the process. And if you're good, I may come in and fuck you again tonight. Lucky you!" And the worst part is, he's right — that is the only carrot in the world that could make this jackass move.

Byron came back from the kitchen carrying two bowls of soup on a tray. He set the tray down, then set himself down in the seat across the table.

"I still don't understand what it is I'm supposed to be doing."

"You don't have to understand," Byron said, helping himself to a sandwich. "You're just the actor. You're doing fine. Eat."

David obeyed before he realized he was obeying, and the sandwich tasted too good to lay aside out of pride. He had told Byron he could have two days; that period of time was now one-fourth passed, and he had survived. All he had to do was live through the other three-fourths and Byron would be gone and he could go back to being his own master again. Back to rest, back to quiet, back to . . . all right, back to death. Why not? Death was a big role to play; why shouldn't man want to practice before the final performance?

"You sleep well last night?"

He had not realized he was going to ask the question. It came out before he realized the implications — but once he'd asked it, he waited with curiosity for Byron's answer.

"Yes, considering everything."

Now there was an answer for you! How was that for avoiding the issue? Score one for Byron!

"I didn't, really. I had this rather weird dream."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I dreamed that you came into my room."

"That's natural enough," Byron said, getting another sandwich. "I told you I had murdered a man. You probably thought I was going to come in and murder you."

"No, it wasn't murder, exactly . . ."

"Tonight lock your bedroom door.

You'll sleep better."

"Maybe I will."

He watched Byron's eyes, hoping for some sign betraying the internal, but there was nothing. Byron looked back at him with his usual clear, untroubled eyes, a single speck of gold in the right one. There was no indication of guilt, or remembrance, of deliberate manipulation, of anything. Byron looked as if he had just been born, full-grown, his mind a perfectly empty page still to be typed upon.

"How long of a break were you planning on for lunch?"

Distraction tactics? Oh, well, what the hell?

"Mind if I cut that a little short? This weather's too good to waste. Why don't you finish your lunch, then we'll have a cigarette, then go back. We'll need another break during the afternoon anyway."

"You know, you could be the cause of my getting fat again."

"Not in two days. Besides, I intend to work it off you."

"Thanks a heap, Tonto."

"You can just call me Jack LaLane."

"Simon Legree would be closer to the truth."

"You love it, you know you do. A masochist like you. 'Beat me! Beat me! I want to suffer.' "

"And if I did you'd be sadistic enough to sit there saying 'No chance! Suffer, bitch!' "

"My duty in life is to fulfill each man's needs -- as long as I fulfill my own first, of course."

"Oh, of course. I've noticed that quality in you."

"Because if I didn't fulfill myself first, then people would just waste my time for me, as you're doing now."

"Poor baby! My heart bleeds for you. What about my time? What about your wasting that?" David said.

"You gave me two days. It wasn't a very generous gift, really, but it's enough. Now I intend to use it."

"And the nights, too. What about the nights of those two days?"

"I can't film at night. What you do with your nights is your own decision."

"I wish it were that simple."

"So do I. Are you about ready?"

Annoyed, David threw the sandwich he was eating back onto the plate. "Yes, of course. Any time you are."

Byron was grinning. "Good. Let's get going then."

During that long, hot afternoon he waged his war against Byron, a curious war not openly declared or obvious, but a war of nerves, a war of resistance, a war of subtle guerrilla tactics, a mere undermining of progress rather than an outright stopping of it. If Byron noticed, he did not comment or in any way respond. When David had stopped for a moment in a fit of coughing, self-induced, Byron had merely stopped the camera and waited, frowning, for the seizure to cease. When he sat for long moments, dressed in an old dress and seemingly ready for a ball,

merely staring into space, Byron had photographed the first moments, then shut off the camera and waited, all the martyrdom of Saint Francis etched onto his face. When he complained that he was tired, Byron agreed that he could have a ciagrette break -- and he'd just finished one cigarette when Byron started him moving again. Whatever the problem, Byron had an answer -- even if the answer were nothing more than waiting out the problem. And there was never the slightest indication that there was anything wrong, no more than there was any indication of what had happened during the past long night. David was amazed at how easy it would be to hate Byron, to want to hurt him. Pain, at least, was an emotion!

"In this next scene I want you to show more emotion," Byron said. "Really let yourself go."

In this next scene I want you to get fucked! Which really wasn't a bad idea, when you thought about it. Why not? Why should dear little Byron just sit there on the sidelines, looking down benevolently like a Buddhistic statue? Why shouldn't he get his little bod dirty, too? After all, it's his fucking movie!

"I think I'm going to need your help on the next scene," David said.

"Why? What do you mean? It's your fantasy."

"I know, but there's this one fantasy where this other guy was involved. Isn't there any way you could set up the camera and act out the fantasy with me?"

"Well . . . yes, it could be done, if it's necessary. But why can't you just act it out yourself, like you've been doing?"

"Because this one someone else acted out with me. It was my first homosexual experience. It happened while we were playing dress-up together."

Byron was rubbing his chin. "I don't remember that from The Novel."

"No, I didn't put it in The Novel. There were lots of reasons why. But anyway, it is important. You'll have to help me act it out."

"Well . . ."

"It's just play-acting. Surely you've done that before!"

"Well, I . . . yes, I guess everybody's done that before."

"So come and play dress-up with me. You're Kevin Scott, a neighbor boy when I was still in Kansas."

"Well . . . let me set the camera up first, on a tripod. We'll have to make certain we stay within range."

"No problem. Most of the action's lying down anyway."

If Byron felt discomfort, he didn't show it. David watched him closely as he set up the camera, clarified the stage, guided the camera to record the approaching action, but there wasn't a single sign of fear or nervousness or even emotion.

He's got a real tough cool, he thought grudgingly. *And boy is he going to need it!*

Lights! Camera! Action! David smiled as he watched Byron enter the stage, the first signs of uncertainty finally starting to show: the hesitant walk, a look of doubt

in the eyes, the faint odor of human fear (Goddeux smelled it, too; he looked up from his sleep under the tree nearby offstage.). He felt like being a bitch, like saying something about, "Oh, just act natural!" but he took pity instead.

"Hi, Kevin! Hey, you want to play dress-up?" *Give him a role to clothe himself with, at least. Few people can bear to write through the naked first person I.*

"Yeah, sure. Sounds like fun."

Hey, not bad! At least there's a hint of a Kansas boy there. Are all artists automatically actors?

"There's some clothes over there in that box. Let's try them on."

The box was to their right, but still comfortably within camera range. They walked over to it. David immediately spotted a dress that looked like one he had played in before, in that other fantasy of youth, and so he picked it. Byron stood looking down at the pile of clothing like a guest, interested but removed.

"Try something on," David said. "Here, here's a dress. Put it on."

"But . . . well, I . . ."

"Or if you don't like that one, Kevin, try this one. It's pretty."

"All right. It'll be fine."

What happened to that touch of Kansas? David began stripping off his clothes, down to his shorts. The afternoon air was welcome against his naked chest and back, cooling the sweat. He decided to take the shorts off, too. *See anything you recognize?* He slipped the dress over his head. The feel of satin against his skin bothered him. It had been too long -- but he refused to let it bring him down. *Come on, Kevin. Let's get stripped for action!*

Byron undressed shyly, like a boy unsure of his first pubic hairs, and his shorts stayed on. David admired the body openly, not ashamed now, forcing their night together out into the open. He wanted to go farther right then, to reach out and touch the pattern of pale hair on Byron's chest, to kiss those proud nipples defenseless before him, to rip those shorts away and remember the secret they were hiding -- that secret lover he had not yet seen in the light of day. But he forced himself to wait, to play the game out to its logical conclusion, to take Byron on a fantasy trip right to the end, to resolve the secret of love by coaxing the lover out into light.

"I can make you some hair like mine, if you want," he offered. "All I have to do is take a straight piece of cloth and tear it and make braids on both sides."

"No, that's all right," Byron said, slipping the dress over his head. "We can just imagine that I have naturally curly hair."

Byron pulled the dress down into place, and David started laughing. He couldn't help himself. The fantasy was destroyed by the comic reality of Byron in drag. And it was Byron, not Kevin, who stood before him. Byron, the man with hair on his chest showing through the lace net of the dress; Byron, the man who could direct others to do what he could not comfortably do himself; Byron, the man who was aloof, removed, princely,

now reduced to the silliness of a drag queen; Byron, the beautiful, the supreme, the ultimate, was really only some silly old clown in a dress.

"Cut!"

"I'm sorry, but you . . ."

"Cut!"

And Byron walked over to shut off the camera. David laughed all the harder, watching him walk, the skirt of the dress bouncing about his hairy bare feet and ankles. Then, to top it off, when Byron reached the camera he reached into his pocket for the lens cover, only to rediscover he was wearing a dress. He swore under his breath, and David laughed. Like the Walls of Jericho, he had blown down Byron's cool.

"Since you obviously can't keep a straight face at the sight of me in drag, I think I'll put on my pants."

"All right." He tried to calm down as Byron pulled the dress up over his head and threw it into the pile of clothing. "You can be the daddy instead."

"Why do I have to be anything? Why can't you just imagine it?"

"I told you before, for this I'll have to have someone I can act against. I can't do it alone. Of course, if you wanted to we could stop for now and then maybe . . ."

"No, I'll do it. But I'm afraid I'm more of a director than an actor."

"Yes, but don't you feel that a director should really be both? I mean, doesn't it broaden the scope of experience . . ."

Byron had finished dressing. He walked back to the camera and adjusted it. "What do you want me to do?"

"Well, this here will be our home, see. I'll be the mommy and you'll be the daddy coming home from work. Just walk in like this was a home. That tree down over there can be the divan. And here, this brush is part of the kitchen. I'll be in the kitchen when you come in."

Lights! action! camera!

David played at the role fiercely. He wiped counter tops and set food to cooking over an imaginary stove and mopped the floor with a branch. Byron walked in, something like a daddy returning home from work.

"Hello, hon. Welcome home."

"Thanks. What's for dinner?"

"Aren't you even going to kiss me first?"

"Oh, sure."

Byron moved forward; they met, but all David got was a quick peck on the cheek. Then Byron moved over to the imaginary sink and began running imaginary water for an imaginary wash. *Water hot enough for you?* David handed him an imaginary towel.

"What have you been doing with yourself all day?"

"Oh, I rounded up some cows and took them in to market," Byron said. "What about you?"

"Oh, I fucked the hired hand, then ate Junior for lunch and then this afternoon . . ."

"Be serious!"

"I've never been more serious. Let's go make babies."

"Look . . ."

DAVID LOVES BYRON
DAVID LOVES BYRON
D. CURZON

"Let's go make babies, Kevin."

"All right." The words were almost a sigh.

David lay down on the ground. "This is the bed. Come on, lay down beside me."

Byron obeyed, not vocally objecting now, and David felt victorious, for he had used Byron's own weapons against him and won.

Come to poppa, baby. Poppa and mamma and little old David all rolled into one.

"Play with my cunt. Make me taste copper pennies!"

And he did not have to wait now, did not have to restrain himself. He reached over and touched Byron's chest, unbuttoning a button, running his hand behind the shirt to touch the diamond-pattern of soft hair. They kissed, like a man and woman in bed, both hot, wanting, demanding. Hands moved, caressed, touched, explored, at first in a planned direction, but then moving on their own. The kiss lasted, changing from Byron and David to daddy and mommy to David and Kevin to Byron and David. David hardened quickly under the exploring fingers, felt Byron's hardness in return.

"Cut!"

"Why . . ."

"That'll be enough for that scene," Byron said pleasantly, pulling away and already adjusting his clothes. "Why don't you get ready for the next scene now? I'll have to reload the camera."

"But I . . ."

"Games are fun to play, aren't they?" he asked, standing up. "You never get too old for games." He walked away triumphantly.

David demanded a rematch, a chance to even the score, although he knew that the score wouldn't actually be even until he had won completely. He wanted Byron again, sexually as during last night, but he wanted him now, while he was certain that he was awake, not merely dreaming. He could not understand Byron's reluctance to have their love mentioned, brought to the surface. They had so little time to be together, so why couldn't they enjoy that little time they had. Eating dinner that night, he decided to force the issue, one way or the other.

"I've thought of another fantasy that might interest you."

"Better save it for tomorrow," Byron said.

"No, it's something we could shoot at night."

"At night? You mean like right now?"

"Sure. It's supposed to be spooky and all that. Wouldn't you get a ghostly atmosphere if you shot inside the cabin at night? Without any additional lighting?"

"Yeah, it'd be pretty dark and shadowy, all right."

"That's the perfect setting for this fantasy. It's a monster fantasy."

"I thought you wanted to rest tonight."

"Oh, this one won't be too hard to do. Might as well get it out of the road now, while we can. You might decide to leave early tomorrow night."

"Are you so anxious still to get rid

of me?"

"No! I only . . ."

"Okay," Byron interrupted, smiling. "I was planning to leave tomorrow night, right after dinner. My two days are up then. So you're right. If we're going to shoot this monster thing, then we'll have to do it tonight. What kind of monster is it?"

"A cocksucker."

"A what?"

"A cocksucker. There's this scientist, see, who isn't too beautiful. A test-tube blew up in his face or something, and he's real ugly. Nobody loves him type of crap. So he invents this robot that's the perfect duplicate of a human except that it can serve only one function — it sucks cocks. So the scientist thinks he's got his problem licked. He builds the machine, tries it out, and finds it almost perfect. And here's where the real art come in, man, hot and heavy. See, if the scientist had let well enough alone, he would have been all right. But he wasn't satisfied. He wanted his machine to be perfect, better than any human cocksucker, better even than imagination. So he corrected the settings in the robot, and decided to try it again. The robot started sucking him off. He knew he had achieved his goal. The feeling was greater than any pleasure he had known. He felt himself lifted to the peaks of ecstasy. Then he began screaming in sheer pleasure. Then in agony when he realized that he had gone one step too far, beyond the territory of man, he climaxes, dies, the life sucked from him by the robot. And so The Cocksucker leaves the dead body of the scientist and goes out into the world, looking for live cocks to suck. Sometimes you can see him on the streetcorner, late at night, looking like any other normal fairy, but don't go with him, or you will die coming."

Byron sat slowly scratching his chin. "I assume that I'm to play the scientist."

"I can't very well play both parts."

"You never give up, do you? I admire your persistence, anyway."

"Water washing persistently against a rock will eventually destroy that rock."

"Funny, but I've never thought of myself as a rock before."

"Listen!"

"What?"

"Didn't you hear that? Someone's coming!"

"I know. It's The Cocksucker!"

"No! Look at Goddeux! He heard it, too. It might be the police."

"Yeah, maybe you're right. Sometimes I forget I'm a murderer."

"The blinds are pulled, anyway. You'll have to hide."

"Who could it be?"

"I don't know. Mark, maybe, home early. I don't know."

"Can't you trust your friends?"

"I don't know . . . I . . . I don't even know if it is a friend. It could be someone else."

"How would someone else get through the locked gate?"

"They could drive around it. It's happened before. You better hide. Quick, go up to your bedroom. Whoever it is, I'll

try to keep them down here."

The whine of the car pulling up the steep hill was clear now, not to be questioned. Lights played against the drawn drapes from the outside in. Goddeux was starting to growl.

"Perhaps it's a trap. Maybe you've already betrayed me. Or maybe you're planning to, this first chance you get."

They were standing together in the dining area, too close together for David's comfort. He heard the car stop, Goddeux bark while he looked only into Byron's eyes, trying to answer the questions he saw there. The car door slammed.

"It's Dick. You'll have to hide."

"You don't trust your friends, do you?"

"No, I . . . I don't know. Before The Novel, yes, but . . . afterwards, I just don't know."

There were footsteps on the porch, then a knock on the door that Goddeux answered with a bark. Byron turned away then and started up the stairs to the bedrooms. David waited through a second knock, then walked over and opened the door, ordering the dog back.

"Hello, Dick," he said, and the two old friends embraced in welcome.

Dick had some new grass, and after David had fixed him a quick dinner — he managed to cart Byron's dishes from the table before Dick noticed them — they smoked, turning the lights down low and the stereo on, preparing themselves for the dialogue that would inevitably follow. David studied Dick as he smoked, remembering first back sixteen years when he had fallen in love with him. They had never really made it as lovers, although they had tried hard — unfortunately never at the same time — but they did become friends, close friends that time only soldered together more closely. A great deal had happened to each of them during that time: David had published The Novel, became an international success, just to return to almost complete oblivion again; Dick had married, had three children who he loved with understanding and compassion, had divorced and almost killed himself, and then had returned to the gay life of San Francisco.

"I think I've found my Dick," Dick said.

David, relaxed and silly from the pot, broke into his bray of laughter. "I didn't know it was even missing."

"Yeah, it's been gone for months now. I just couldn't remember where I'd left it. So I went down to the baths and sure enough, there it was! Or at least I think it's mine, anyway. That's why I'm not really sure I've found it. Do you realize I could be walking around right now with somebody else's Dick?"

"You've been doing that ever since I've known you."

"You bitch! No, seriously now. I'm beginning to know what you felt like when you met me. I'm about the same age now as you were then, and I've met this kid who's eighteen. David, it's love. It really is."

David relaxed even more, substituting a cigarette for the joint. *The drama for*

tonight will be a repeat performance of that old classic, "Dick's New Lover," now in its eighteenth year of production.

"Hate to burst your bubble, baby, but I was only thirty when I met you. You can't possibly pass for thirty now, not even in your own fantasies, sexual or otherwise. And even though I was a young thirty, I was still far too old for you at eighteen. So this new love affair can't possibly work."

"Sometimes I think, what if he were to die up there in that cabin. No one would ever know. The dog would starve for a few days and then start eating the body."

"He's beautiful, of course. That goes without saying. Your taste in men has improved considerably over the years. You saw him standing shirtless raking the yard in front of an old, two-story house in Ripon. There was a diamond-pattern of soft hair on his chest, and potential muscles in his arms, a twinkle in the eyes left over from childhood, a cock that swings like a fresh cow's teat, leaking in overabundance, only to turn to stone at the touch, aching into you with the force of an arrow."

"Should I applaud?"

"Only he's too young. He doesn't understand yet. There's no way for him to understand until he experiences, and each time he feels the pains of experience it bangs your heart. And there is no way to shorten the time, to bridge the gap between you. No way."

"You have to be wrong."

"Until he learns, and comes to you some night, too late, and says, 'I think I've found my Dick.' "

"Is it really too late?"

"Are you after my bod?"

"Sometimes I wonder if I have ever really loved anyone but you," Dick said softly.

"I'm tempted to be funny and suggest something to the effect that you should throw yourself onto my grave or something, but I think instead I'll just say 'Thank you.' "

"You're welcome."

"I think I told you once, when we first met, that I would always love you, too. Love doesn't seem to die easily, once it's planted."

Dick lit another joint, possibly, perhaps, to shift the conversation. "You know, sometimes I regret that I didn't stay in San Francisco that first time."

"You'll always have regrets, every time you have to make a choice. If you hadn't gone home, you would have regretted that."

"I know. And at least I had to give that a try."

"You gained from it. At least it helped you get to where you are now."

"Yeah, but where am I now? Right back to where I started, only this time the shoe's on the other foot."

"So now you'll understand me better. That's progress."

"I could have read The Novel and saved a lot of time."

"Not unless you could have identified with it. That's not always so easy. Besides, it's more fun learning from your

own."

"And so who do I get to teach?"

"Your Dick."

"My love."

"All our loves, perhaps. All of our lovers."

"Why is it that you have to destroy before you can create? If I take Bill on as a lover I'll destroy him like he is now. But I think I can create something better."

"The artistic compulsion. The god in man. The cock, which in mind at least is always ready to penetrate the virgin. I don't know. Call it Ego."

"But I'm going to do it."

"Yes, of course. So would I, if I had the chance." And for the first time he thought about Byron, still hiding upstairs in the bedroom. It was getting late. Dick obviously intended to stay overnight. Somehow Byron had to be gotten out of the house before Dick went upstairs to bed. And there was only one way out, and that was down those very stairs that Dick was looking at. The only other alternative was to get Dick so high that he would pass out, and that didn't really seem likely, since they were on their sixth joint each and Dick was still babbling on.

"You know, that's true of everything, though. In order to cook you have to destroy the food first, and in order to paint you have to destroy the paint and the canvas."

"Yes," David agreed. "Just make certain that what you're creating is worth the price."

"It can't always be."

"No, but you can hope and try. As long as you try, then you can't be totally wrong."

"But sometimes you get tired of trying."

"That's a hell of a way for a guy with a new young lover to talk."

"I mean it, David. I'm getting old."

"I know. I already am, you know. And I can remember. You reach a point when you begin wondering if the price is too high, and then you haggle, and you lose it."

"You speak so pretty. You should write a novel."

"No one would ever read it if I did."

"Oh, yes, let's go into Crying for David Time. Why don't you put on Buffy's record and really go all out?"

"Isn't it about time for you to go to bed?"

"Hell, I thought you'd never ask me."

Dick stood up, but David sat still, his mind confused by the pot, wondering how he could ever get Byron out of the bedroom and Dick into it, without one seeing the other. If Dick went to the bathroom first, it would be all right. But he couldn't count on Dick doing that. Was there some way he could force him to? No, because Dick would then really become suspicious. He would just have to play the scene out naturally, and hope that Byron could find a way out for himself. He could always go out the window, jumping to the ground. It was a high drop, but he could make it.

"Well, are you going to bed? You were the one who suggested it."

"I was just trying to remember if the spare bed has clean sheets."

"Well, I'm sure not going to worry about it. Good night, I'll see you in the morning."

"Good night."

And he sat there and waited as Dick climbed the stairs, expecting to hear something when Dick entered the bedroom, but there was no sound. He heard Dick turn on the light, go into the bathroom to urinate — "My, you can sure tell he's not a virgin, can't you?" — and then return to turn out the light and climb into the bed. If Byron was still in the room, Dick evidently hadn't seen him. If he were there, he could stay hidden until Dick slept and then sneak out. Satisfied, David stood up and headed for his own bedroom. He did not usually close his bedroom door — he wanted to let Goddeux roam freely in and out — but he did tonight, and even bolted the lock shut afterwards. If Byron wanted to play games, okay, but he'd be damned if he'd join him in his little fantasy.

At first he thought it was Goddeux who had awakened him, coming into his room in search of security, but then he remembered that he had bolted the door, and he sat up. There was little light in the room — the sky must be cloudy again — and without his glasses he could barely see the length of it anyway. But he thought he saw something moving over by the door.

"Byron?"

There was no answer. The chill of night air against his back made him consider first going back to sleep, but then he remembered that he had locked the door. If it were Byron, he had to have come in through the window. It would have been possible, of course, for Byron to have climbed out the window of the other bedroom across the roof, and entered his room. But why hadn't he answered when he had whispered the name?

"Byron? Is that you?"

He strained his vision to make out what appeared to be a man sitting in the chair by the closet.

"Byron?"

Was it all part of a game? Or was Byron planning to kill him, perhaps? At the moment he didn't care much, one way or the other.

"Byron, is that you?"

But he did want an answer. He threw the covers back and walked over to the chair. When he got close he realized that the man was merely his pants and shirt thrown over the back of the chair. He looked around, saw movement at the door. Byron was standing in the doorway, smiling at him. He didn't want to move toward him, but he did.

Something cold struck him across the front of his nude body, and he jolted backwards in shock. He saw Byron's cock, and he reached out to touch it, only to touch that icy coldness again. Then he realized that he was touching the mirror

on the back of the door.

He laughed, bitterly. "No, I don't think you're Byron." He went back to bed.

David set the hot tea onto the table, went back to the stove for the hot Danish. As usual, Dick had brought more food than a regiment could possibly eat . . . well, not food, exactly, but "treats," sweets to be eaten after pot. Yet they had forgotten all about them last night. So David was trying to get rid of some before Dick left. *If I eat all these things by myself, I'll weigh a ton.* He considered serving potato chips and dip with breakfast, but decided against it. Instead he sat down at the table, poured himself some hot tea, and lit up the first cigarette of the day.

"You can pour mine too," Dick mumbled, not totally awake yet.

David poured. "Sex is like writing, I think. There's a time when you exhaust it. It burns out on you. And then there's nothing left but a bad taste in your mouth in the mornings."

"Your inspirational talk for the day?"

"I think this cigarette's making me high again. That was good grass. Anyway I feel philosophical as hell this morning."

"I usually just feel hard in the mornings."

"That, too, will pass."

"I can hardly wait."

"What else?"

"When are you coming back down to The City? You're not writing now, so you can't use that excuse. In fact you couldn't use that excuse for years, come to think about it. So how come I let you?"

"That's what friends are for, to accept your illusions."

"Speaking of illusions, I want you to meet Bill."

"Why? I already totally approve of him. Anyone who does to you what you once did to me must be all good."

"Who knows, maybe you'll fall in love with him, too."

"That's exactly what I need right now, an eighteen-year-old lover."

"Don't knock it until you've tried it."

"I've tried it, remember?"

"This is different," Dick said, pouring more tea. "This is love."

"That's what they all say."

"You know, you're really turning into a bitter old man."

"Turning, hell! I've been this way for years. I just used to hide it better, that's all. Now I just figure the hell with it."

"You need a good lay."

"No, not really," David said, thinking of Byron, wondering where he was right then, if he had slept all right, if he had food. "My price is higher than that, even these days."

"It could make you start writing again."

"No lay could be that good."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Dick said, lighting a cigarette.

"You're such a silly romantic."

"No, I'm a pagan. I worship cock, and I admit it. So do you. Pencils are even shaped like phallic symbols."

"Typewriters aren't."

"But they're just a sophisticated replacement. The intention behind the act is still the same."

"Thank you, Dr. Freud. Now that I know why I write, I can stop doing it."

"I'll send you a bill," Dick said, then stretched. "And speaking of Bill, I've got to get going. I want to see him this morning as soon as he gets off work."

"Where does he work?"

"At the baths. That's where I met him. He's the clerk there or something."

"Probably something."

"Such a bitch!" Dick said, standing up.

"At least you should miss the commute traffic."

"Yeah. Well look, old fart, why don't you come down to see me sometime soon?"

David stood up and they came together in a long hug, each encircling the other in his arms. "I'll try, Dick. But I don't promise. The City lost much of its charm for me years ago."

"You don't have to visit The City. Just come down to The City to visit me."

"I'll consider it. That's about all I'll promise, and I wouldn't even do that for just everybody."

"Okay, I guess I'll have to settle for that," Dick said, pulling his keys out of his pocket. "Well, I've really got to go."

They moved together to the door, Goddeux following along for the chance to go outside. Once there, David stopped. They embraced again quickly, and Dick and the dog went outside. "I'll see you" they exchanged, and then David closed the door and leaned against it. He heard the car door slam, the engine start, the car pulling away. He followed it by sound down the long hill of a driveway, believing he even heard the squeal of tires as Dick drove onto the highway. *Byron!*

He ran up the stairs, thinking that just possibly Byron might have spent the night hidden in the room, possibly in the closet. But if he had, he'd left that morning before David got there, for the closet was empty. *He must have gotten out somehow last night.* He wondered where he could have gone and where he was right then. He had to find him.

Forgetting to put on a sweater against the morning chill, he ran down the stairs and outside, stopping on the porch long enough to decide direction, joined by Goddeux at the corner of the house. He would go down to look in Gene's cabin first; if Byron wasn't there, there might at least be some signs that he'd spent the night there. It was so easy running downhill that there was a temptation to go too fast. On the slope, where the road forked off to hit the highway, he had to stop running altogether and instead use his feet for brakes.

When he reached the cabin, it was still locked and appeared empty. He found the key hidden under the porch and let himself in. There was nothing in the living room or kitchen to suggest that anyone had been there recently. He went upstairs. Both bedrooms were empty of signs, too. *So he didn't spend the night here. Then where in the hell is he?*

He couldn't move very quickly up the

hill, and he cursed his age under his breath. The only real problem with age was the physical limitations that hung like a lead chain around your neck. If science could overcome that, then he wouldn't mind getting old.

Back up at his own cabin, panting for breath, he decided to rest for a moment before starting to search the property. He might at least be able to find Byron's car. When he stepped through the door, he found Byron sitting at the table, where Dick had eaten his breakfast, drinking some hot coffee.

"Oh!"

"Where've you been?"

He had to pant for a moment before he could answer. "I've been looking for you."

"I'm right here."

"Thanks for telling me."

"You about ready to start work? There isn't much time left, you know."

"Yeah, I know. I'm ready. You might even say I'm ready and waiting in breathless anticipation."

"Good! Let's get started then."

"Why not? I mean, what else would you do on a perfect morning like this?"

Byron set his cup down. "I never did understand why critics said you were funny."

"Maybe they meant funny peculiar."

"Maybe," Byron agreed, standing up. "Well, let's get going."

It had been one hell of a day. From the morning David had fought with Byron every shot of the way, refusing to accept direction, refusing even to consider any method of acting other than his own. He was being a real prick, and he knew it. Like a rebellious child, he was determined to destroy in order to attract someone's interest. David knew he was being unfair, he knew that his quest for revenge was childish, he realized he was wasting time, and yet he still played the game out, determined to go on until the end.

But the end came a lot sooner than he expected. Byron gave him an order to move in a certain fashion and David ignored him and deliberately moved in an opposite way. Byron yelled, "Cut!", turned off the camera and set it down, walked over to David and slugged him, a direct hit right to the jaw. David fell over backwards from the force and the shock. He hit the ground with his butt first, so he wasn't damaged, but his rage started rising as soon as he realized what had happened. He let out a grunt of rage, not conscious enough yet to make intelligent sound, but before he could rise up to strike back in anger, Byron was upon him. The boy's body lay across his chest, weighing him down, the face pressed against his, the mouth resting on his, then pressing, then kissing, tonguing, exploring. Again David was shocked into acceptance, his own lips betraying his response before his brain had time to classify and reject. The kiss held while hands roamed and passion began to stretch.

Then Byron pulled back and away just as quickly as he had begun. "Now are you satisfied?"

David lay in the grass, still dazed, and looked up at Byron. *Who is he anyway? What's happening to me?* He considered the question, but he didn't understand. "I . . . I don't . . . yes."

"Good, let's get back to work then."

And so they did.

The afternoon went fast. Two professionals now, each conscious of an approaching deadline, they worked together smoothly, scene after scene, one location after another. By four o'clock the last scene was finished, the movie was filmed, or at least the part which required David was filmed. When Byron finally said "Cut!" and then added, "Okay, that's it. It's over!" David had sunk to the ground in exhaustion. He lit a cigarette, lay back in the grass and smoked while Byron worked with the camera, unloading it and putting it away.

"You did a good job," Byron said, standing over him. "It was much better than I expected."

"Thank you, I think."

"Oh, you're not ready for the actor's union yet, but you can project an emotion when you really try."

"The sky's pretty today. Look at that big cloud over there! It looks like a big castle."

"Yeah. Look, there's a horse."

"That's a silly-looking horse."

"There's no bathroom in your castle."

David looked up. Byron was standing close by his head. He saw the legs in their tight Levi's, looking longer from that angle, the mound of the cock curving out and then in again, the chest, the face upsidedown. *I love you,* he thought. *Because you are beautiful.*

Byron reached his hand down, and David reached up, their hands touching palm against palm. "Why don't you go on in and take a long hot bath and then a nap? I'll fix dinner. I want something special, since it's our last supper together. Besides, I want to celebrate."

"We could eat outside, on the patio. And use candles, in those little glass lamps, so they won't blow out."

"I'll run into town and buy some wine. Champagne for afterwards."

"We should have a steak for Goddeux, so he can celebrate, too."

"Don't worry! I won't forget Goddeux."

It seemed like it should be time for the sun to set, but it was really only late afternoon yet. There was a silence of sound in the woods, an absence of bird noises and animal cries that usually came only at sunset. It was as though some god had said, "Hush!" to their world, to give them time to pause and appreciate the joys of their labors. David wasn't ready to move yet, even though the idea of a bath was tempting — he could almost imagine the pleasure of hot water on his tired muscles -- and even though he ached to look in a mirror to see if his jaw was swollen. But something bid him stay, perhaps the moment itself. He was tired and happy and satisfied. The movie was

finished. They had achieved something together, both on the film and in their relationship. He wanted to rest for a moment and enjoy it.

But it would soon be dark. Not for hours, but still too soon. And then Byron would leave. *Hold back the night!!* There was no servant to obey.

"I suppose I should go on in and take my bath."

"Yes, you should."

"Why do good things have to end so soon?"

"So that they'll be easier to remember later."

"And not take up so much space when you're writing about them?"

"I suppose," Byron agreed. "Make room for tragedy."

As though on cue, two bluejays landed in a nearby tree, cursing the air, blue commas on a green page. Then all sound stopped. *Who yelled "Cut!"?* It was as though they were sitting in that empty space between two parenthesis, waiting to be typed over.

"God!"

"Silence is beautiful."

"Music."

"The ultimate music of the future will be silence."

"In stereo."

Sitting side by side, now, they listened.

David awoke from his nap to the sounds of merriment. The stereo was playing waltzes, the windows had been opened to the last of the sun, there were noises of food cooking in the kitchen. He threw his clothes on and ran out, to find Byron arranging some hyacinths in a bowl. He saw the bottle of champagne chilling in its bucket, the odor of steak struck his nose, onions frying. Even Goddeux had been caught up in the excitement, for he ran around in circles, yapping, like a two-year-old pup.

"You do know how to celebrate, don't you?"

"Yep," Byron said, placing the last flower. "It's orgy night tonight. Incidently I've been smoking some of your grass."

"Fine. I offered it to you before."

"I was making a movie before. Now I'm celebrating. Why don't you smoke some now, and then we'll get dressed for dinner."

"Fine with me," David agreed, taking a joint from the container on the bookcase and lighting it. "What's this about dressing for dinner, though? Surely you don't mean white tie and tails."

"Nope, just the opposite. White bathrobes. I found two of them in my bedroom. They even had hoods."

"We'll look like fucking nuns or something."

"That's all right, we'll be comfortable, anyway. Besides, we have to dress special for such a special occasion."

"What's so special about the occasion?"

"It's our last supper together."

"I know," David agreed. "I just wasn't sure if you did. Let's make it a fucking orgy."

"Okay! Bring on the food!"

"Hell, you mean *that's* all an orgy is?" David said. "Damn!"

"I can just see the movie version. 'The Last Supper Regurgitated'. Produced, directed and starred in by that great American genius, Byron."

"Just one name? Must be a fairy."

"Co-starring none other than that unemployed American writer, David."

"Just the one name. Gee that sounds so butch!"

"Plus Goddeux the dog, Tender Loin the steak, and Chief Dish That Ran Away With the Spoon."

"Don't forget K.Y."

"You get to play the twelve disciples."

"I'd rather be that than Miss Christ." "Hello, I'm John. Wanna' pick up thy stick and follow me?" . . . "If he doesn't give me some sign tonight, I swear I'm going to turn him over to the Jews. I would have already if they weren't trying to be so damn cheap about it." . . . "If I could just sit on his lap, just for a minute" . . . I bet my brother gets to him first. He always does. Here I've been dragging my ass around trying to keep up and I'll bet . . . "I've got to be first. I don't care what happens after that, but I've got to be first." . . . "I doubt if he even likes me as much as he does all the rest of you. I doubt if he likes me at all. I mean he certainly never shows it. Oh, the other day he did wink at me. I almost had him raped before I realized he just had something in his eye. But I doubt if he'll pick me. Not tonight, anyway. I doubt it." . . . I wonder if . . ."

"All right!" Byron interrupted. "I told you you can have the roles. Don't audition now."

"If we do this tonight, won't we have to have the crucifixion scene tomorrow? I get to nail you to the cross."

"Just make sure you nail my legs together."

"Christ, you don't trust me."

"Right on! Before this night is over, one of you will betray me."

"Oh let it be me! Please let it be me!"

"I think dinner's about ready," Byron said, wrinkling his nose into a sniff.

"Blood and crackers again! This is getting ridiculous!"

"Why don't you change into your robe and smoke a joint. I'll put the food on the table and then change and smoke a joint."

"Meet you at the orgy in ten minutes?"

"Better make it five, unless you like cold blood."

"Wouldn't know," David said, already stripping his shirt off over his head. "Never been in it."

"The robes are on my bed," Byron called after him.

By the time he'd reached the top of the stairs, he was naked. He found the robes lying across the bed, deliberately took the larger one for himself to leave more of Byron exposed, wrapped it around himself and pulled it tight with the belt. He didn't want shoes of any kind -- the night was warm enough to go barefooted. Going back out through the door, he noticed Byron's bags, packed and waiting, along with the camera equipment.

I need a joint!

He ran down the stairs -- *fucking*

Mother Superior being chased by atheistic Red rapist (aren't they all?) — found the joint in the container, — *Peter! Light my fire!* — lit up, — *Thank God I'm not a fucking alcoholic!* — felt the relief flowing through him with the smoke, — *sure beats television, by crackie* — and how the possibility for humor already beginning. — *Would you like to hear the story of how I lost my cherry? It's rather funny, actually, if you don't mind the sight of blood.* — and with the possibility of sex lurking like a carrot just beyond — *but don't donkeys ever get the carrot, I mean not even sometimes? (Oh, sure, you can have the carrot, all right, if that's all you want.).*

"Soup's on!"

He's already outside! Hhmmm! Speedy bastard. I bet he's horny for a sight of my beautiful bod. Maybe I should loosen my belt and tease the little devil a bit.

"Come and get it!"

I have to finish this joint first, stupid! You surely don't expect me to swallow that whole thing without an anesthetic, do you?

"Food sure gets cold fast outdoors like this."

You silly subtle bitch.

"I'm coming!"

"So is Christmas."

Putting out the joint, David turned and walked out onto the patio. The atmosphere was set: long table covered with white linen, hot food steaming up, red wine in clear crystal, silverware white with polishing, candles in hurricane lamps still flickering in the late evening breeze. Byron was one white shape, David another, the table the third; nothing else except shadows and black existed in the world.

Byron handed him a plate of food: a steak cut into bite-size pieces, raw vegetables, eggs whole and deviled, cheese and crackers and salami. There was a bowl of raw fruit waiting for dessert.

"So this is an orgy."

"It's the start of one," Byron said.

"I wonder what this is going to cost me."

"Don't worry about it, you've already paid."

The steak was delicious, soaked in some exotic sauce with mushrooms. He ate all of it first, before he started on the vegetables. Yet he was amazed at how satisfying the vegetables were, too, once he tried them. The crispness pleased his mouth.

"I paid before, too, but that didn't stop me from having to pay again."

"What are you bitching about? You got what you really wanted."

"Yes, that's true."

"Sure you paid your dues, but at the same time you got them out of the way early enough to benefit from them. Look at all the people who don't, who even die without paying them."

"Maybe dying without living is their way of paying their dues."

"Maybe," Byron agreed, shrugging. "But to me, at least, it seems one hell of a price. Much worse than you gave."

"Probably. I don't envy anyone, that's true. There isn't anyone in the whole world who I'd want to exchange places

with."

"But there are a hell of a lot of them who would want to exchange places with you."

"I suppose. The fools."

They finished eating then, at least for then, and put the plates back. There were joints already rolled and waiting, so they lit up one before their after-dinner cigarette. They sat together on the wooden bench, sharing the joint and David's glass of wine. David watched the tip of the joint glow in the darkness, then watched it again through its reflection in the wine, like the eye of a fire.

"Your feet stink," Byron said. "You should wash them."

"You want them washed, you wash them."

Laughing, Byron reached over and poured the glass of wine over David's feet. "That'll at least cover the smell."

Laughing, too, David ran over to the table, picked up a deviled egg and threw it at Byron — it caught him on the right ear. Byron leaped toward him, and David started running around the table. From opposite sides they looked at each other, still laughing, daring.

"I'll get you," Byron said.

"I know. I shouldn't have egged you on."

"I'm going to get you for that, too."

"Oh, you're just pissed because the yoke's on you."

"I could kill you and no one would ever know. Not for weeks. I'd be gone by then. They can only murder me once, anyway."

"You've got to catch me first," David said. "For a spastic like you, that isn't going to be easy."

"Want to bet?"

The table flipped over in the air. There was a crashing of plates, silverware clanging, glass shattering, and then Byron was upon him. He flinched, pulled away, leaving the sleeve of his bathrobe for a trophy. He ran toward the house, heard Byron right behind him, sidestepped into the woods, knowing the way even in the blackness, knowing how the next step would feel, should feel. But Byron was younger. Suddenly arms caught around his waist, lifting him up and over. They fell together into the bed of hyacinth, David squirming to be free even before they landed.

"King's X!"

"Like shit!" Byron said. "You're it, baby. You're going to get yours."

"No, don't tickle! Oh, please, don't tickle!"

But the hands touched his ribs, exploring beneath the robe, already beginning to press. His body stiffened, as rigid as a cock waiting for masturbation, and the hands began and the laughter shot out like an orgasm into the blackness and it wouldn't stop. *oh god make it stop oh god* "Byron!" *oh god no not this I can't* and then the pain of pleasure stopped. "That was for the egg," Byron explained. "This is for the joke." And it started again, that agony of laughter, their bodies thrashing together in love and hate and passion and agony. He was going to die laughing. That was how it would be. He

would be laughing and his heart would stop beating and everything would be over. Byron was doing it. Byron was killing him. And he didn't even care, he only wanted it to end.

"Had enough?"

"Oh, god, yes!"

"Say uncle."

"Uncle!uncle!uncle!uncle!uncle!"

Their faces were close together, the breaths clashing in the silence. David felt the weight of Byron's body upon him, their nakedness pressing together where the robes had fallen apart. Leaning forward and up, he pressed his lips against Byron's. Byron responded at first, then suddenly pulled away.

"I can't, David. I can't stay and be your lover. I have to go and pay my dues."

"I know. I don't want to accept it, but I know."

"Someday, maybe, I can come back."

"Maybe that will be enough."

Byron sat up. "I think I better go get dressed now. I have to clean up anyway."

David lay still, looking up for stars, but there weren't any, although the sky was lighter than the earth, there beneath the trees. He smelled the hyacinth beneath and around him, the crushed stalks spending out their last effort before death now. "I could use another joint."

Byron walked back ahead, didn't even stop at the patio. David found the joints and lit one, adjusting his robe about him again. The night air was turning a bit cold.

Pretty soon it'll be over now. Just a little longer.

He finished the joint and was well into a second one before Byron returned, dressed in the clothes he had worn that first day. *It seems so long ago. Almost a lifetime.* Somehow he knew that the bags had already been put into the car, the bedroom cleaned of evidence. *He didn't promise me forever.* The last supper was finished. Bring on the Crucifixion.

David walked over to the table, finishing his joint. Byron sat down on the bench and lit one. There was a scent of hyacinth everywhere, mingled with the scent of evergreens in the air, crushed into his robe, almost too strong, almost suffocatingly overpowerful. He picked up a banana from the fruitbowl and took it to Byron.

"Wanna' smoke this?"

"No. I wouldn't mind making a movie of it, though."

"A movie about a banana?"

"Why not? It's an obvious phallic symbol. Why not make a movie called 'The Fucking Bananas,' and show two bananas fucking each other?"

"It might work. You could show a bed, and then two bananas moving over to it . . ."

"Then they would start to peel . . ."

"A real strip-tease kind of thing. And then they get in bed and start rubbing together . . ."

"Until they mash themselves together totally into one big mess. That's the orgasm."

David lit another joint. "It wouldn't work. There's no plot."

"Besides, you can't get involved with

bananas."

"No, you can't get involved with bananas."

They sat together on the bench, one already thinking ahead, the other fighting to avoid it yet, the smell of marijuana mingling with the drug-like odor of hyacinths. There were no calls from the woods, no sounds of birds or owls or even crickets; just the sound of the stereo playing Shostakovich's "The Festive Overture." They were in a circle of soft light surrounded by blackness. It was their universe only, at least for that moment.

"Someday I'm going to make a movie, too," David said. "Just one movie, but a great one."

"A fantasy trip?"

"No, a realistic comedy about sex. Sex is funny too, you know."

"Yes. Sometimes."

"The first time was for me. I guess I was never able to take it seriously because of that."

"The Lolita bit?"

"I guess so, really."

"And that's what your movie will be about?"

"Yes. 'How I Lost My Cherry,' or something like that."

Byron looked at his watch.

"Oh, you don't have to go yet!"

"No, not just yet. What happened?"

"I was in love. I was only about sixteen, but I was in love. It was a boy who was in the Boy Scouts with me. He was willing, and I knew it. So I fixed up this overnight trip for us. We had to do it to get merit badges or some such crap. So we rode our bicycles out to the river, out east of Antioch, where the factories are now, but there were just sandhills there then. We took everything with us so we could sleep out overnight. We didn't have a tent, just sleeping bags. Correction, bag. When we were loading up I pretended to forget and I left his sleeping bag back in Antioch. Subtle? Man, I tell you! So anyway he goes for it, since he's out on the river and can't do too much about it anyway. Man, that whole day and evening I was just sick from my heat. I wanted to vomit almost. And nervous. I mean, I knew what I wanted to do, but I didn't know if he knew or if he'd do it. And I didn't really know how to find out, except that I figured when we both got into that one mummy sleeping bag then something would happen."

"You were subtle, I must admit."

"I was desperate. Sixteen years old and a virgin. God!"

"Want a joint?"

"Yes, thanks. I think he knew all the time. He couldn't have made me suffer that much if he hadn't known."

"Miss Temptation?"

"Miss Out-and-Out-Cocktease. Every time he had to take a leak he made sure I was watching. And then he took his shirt off. That kid had the potential to become a Mata Hari. But anyway I lived through it. Right up to bedtime. Only that's when I discovered what real frustration was. Oh, we got into that sleeping bag together, all right. He got in first and turned his back on me, and then I got in, rubbing my cock all the way down his

back. It was perfect. We were pressed into that thing like . . . like two bananas squashed together. He couldn't move. I had him."

"What in the hell were you going to do with him, in a sleeping bag?"

"There was room to fuck. Once I got it in I could have fucked him all right. The trouble was getting him to let me put it in. Oh, hell, I forgot about the zipper!"

"What zipper?"

"There was a zipper on the side of the sleeping bag. We didn't have it open at first, because I was afraid to try zipping it up, once I was inside. That's why we crawled in from the top. But then every time my back touched the side, I hit that cold zipper, which was hell on my bare back. Then we had the problem with the shorts. I mean I'd left mine on when I climbed in. It seemed like the thing to do at the time. But then after I'd played with him and got him hard, we had to take our shorts off to fuck. Only we couldn't, because there wasn't enough room to move in. So I had to unzip the zipper while we took them off. And as soon as that cold air hit our cocks they got soft and shriveled up like cow tits."

"You were young then. It shouldn't have taken you long to get back in the mood."

"No, it didn't. As soon as we got that sleeping bag back over us, we got hard again. But we still had to fasten the zipper back up. If I turned toward him, the zipper was behind me. I had to turn all the way around. Even then it was tight, man. And I was scared shitless I was going to catch my cock in the zipper. But I didn't. I managed to miss the cock and get part of my left tit instead."

Byron was laughing. David stopped long enough to light another joint.

"Anyway he helped me get loose, and then he zipped it shut by reaching around me. I was afraid he was going to catch my hair, but he didn't. And then we played with each other a little, and then he turned over again and I tried to shove it in, only he was too tight. I tried spitting on my hand and everything, but it wouldn't work. And I hadn't known enough, or planned enough, to bring a lubricant."

"Didn't you have any butter?"

"Yeah, that's what we finally had to use. But it took us about three million years to think of it. And then I had to get up out of the sleeping bag and go after it. Soon as that river air hit my body, I lost my cock again. Only when I started smearing the butter on, I started getting hard, even in the wind. I kept thinking of that body waiting for me. Man, I warmed up that butter and spread it on fast. I even took a little back to him. Only one problem."

"What's that?"

"I tripped over his fucking bicycle and fell head-first into the sand."

"Oh shit!"

"Yeah." He waited out Byron's laughter, enjoying the story now himself, now that he was removed from it. He finished the joint. "Yeah, it was a mess. There were grains of sand stuck on every inch. And have you ever tried wiping butter off, especially sandy butter? Don't. By the

time we got it off, I was raw. It took us over an hour or more. But we finally did get to bed. And this time he brought the butter. It was worth it, but shit, the frustration!"

Byron stopped laughing. He was looking at his watch again. "That was funny. It would have been nice, in a way, if it had happened like that."

"Yes."

"I've got to go."

"Is that all you can do, just look at that stupid watch? I know, you think it's sexy or something. Instead of a Spiro Agnew watch, it's a Spanish Fly watch. Every hour the fly opens up and a little cock pops out and goes, "Cock-cock" to announce the hour. And you're waiting for a chance to grab that cock and fuck with it. I guess that's what's known as a time piece."

"I've got to go, David. It really is getting late."

"Okay, but why don't we smoke another joint first. Then we can . . ."

"No."

"There are things I want to tell you. There . . ."

"No. I'm sorry, David, but it's time for me to go."

There was nothing left to be said in defense. The time had come, the beast in the jungle had pounced. He felt the talons sinking into his breast, the fangs at his throat and eyes. Byron took his hand, held it but one moment, shook it, then he turned away and melted into the blackness before voice could even find protest. David stood, shaking to keep steady, stoned almost to the point of non-feeling, listening objectively to the sounds until he heard the car door open, then close, and the motor starting. "I've got to get high!" And the car moved away, and the new lover came in the form of marijuana and embraced him.

"NOOOOOO!"

And to the echo of his scream he cried, not for the loss of love, but for the love that must yet die stillborn.

There was no one to go to but bed. But then he was exhausted anyway. He needed that short period of death before he could ever hope to come back to life. He took two sleeping pills, washed them down with a straight shot of whiskey and climbed the stairs. His heart pounded at the exertion, and for a moment he wondered if the joke were turning into a prophecy. But then he made the bedroom and threw himself down across the bed, as though it were a grave, and the death of sleep crept upward from the grave to swallow him whole. He went inside, into blackness unknown since Jonah, and accepted that sexual death-grip of his mistress, his mother, his Shiva, his Vishnu.

He awoke hard, his cock jutting out in rigid determination for release, like a salmon death-determined to achieve his completion of the cycle. He went to the bathroom, started to run cold water over it, then saw the razor instead. He touched the razor to it, threatening, but the cock barely flinched. And so he knew he had

to do it, to complete his cycle, to become a man by the very act of castration.

Something ice-cold touched his bare leg, and he jerked away in fright.

"Oh! Goddeux!"

The dog wagged, begging for attention. David realized he had rather neglected his old friend the last few days. He put down the razor and began patting the dog.

He knew that Byron was in the room before he awoke — that was perhaps why — but he did not understand the why and how and where of it. He opened his eyes to see the grey shadow of Byron undressing beside his bed, and he moaned before he was aware enough to suppress it. Byron leaned forward and kissed his forehead.

"Wake up, beautiful princess."

"You didn't change your mind? You're not . . ."

"No. Just for tonight. You gave me two days of your time. I realized that the least I owed you was two nights of mine."

"You were almost too late."

"I don't think so. I know I took a chance, but I had faith in you."

"And in yourself, knowing that I'd want you back, on any terms, for any length of time."

"Yes."

"Get undressed and come to bed."

It was not so long to wait, really, for that cold-warmth of Byron's body. Kisses erased impatience, caresses soothed out the bumps and knots of pain. He had bought and paid his dues for this; it was his to enjoy. This moment of time, this love, was his, created by and for him, stolen from nobody, the materials paid for with cold, hard pain.

"Hold me," David whispered into the down-soft hair on Byron's chest. "Just hold me, until it's time . . . until you have to go."

"Yes, I'll hold you. You won't go away."

"No, I won't. But you will. You'll go."

"Yes."

It was the season of the hyacinths. He could smell their odor on Byron's body. Now, whenever he smelled that odor, he would remember. It was not enough, but it was at least something.

"Four billion dollars for your thoughts," Byron said, his hand caressing a pattern onto David's back.

"I'm not thinking. I'm just being."

"Being what?"

"And do you like being loved?"

"Yes. Except that I don't want it to ever end, and I know it will."

"But not for a little while."

"No, not for a little while," David agreed. "Kiss me, you fool! Ravish my yearning body!"

"With pleasure!"

Byron shifted, sliding his body down, until their lips were neighbors, and they kissed, Byron holding David's tongue with his lips, sucking, exploring the interior of David's mouth. David burrowed deeper into the man's arms, his nose buried in the soft hair at the base of the neck. He felt content, as though he were home again after a long, hard journey. This

was the womb he would have chosen to return to, this comforting circle of a man's arms. He was warm. He loved the odor of hyacinths mixed with Byron's body scents. He was well-fed. He could have slept there forever, a blissful baby, except that Byron was already starting to shift again, to move his nibbling lips downward, down to the throat, licking the crevice below the thorax, sucking gently on the apple itself, moving down inch by inch with his warm, wet mouth.

"I love you," David whispered, and he thought the words sounded wrong, he was so unused to saying them. But having said them once, they were easier to repeat. "I love you, Byron."

Byron didn't speak, but his working lips responded for him. David knew, and though he sighed for a second over the brevity of their love, he accepted it. This time he shifted, rising up and turning his body around, until their cocks were accessible to each other's mouths. David slid his lips down the long, hard organ. It was like sucking on a porcelain hyacinth. A warm, human porcelain hyacinth. He had not seen that cock hard, in daylight, yet he knew he would remember it easily in the sleepless hours of the years to come.

Byron increased the pressure of his lips, and David tried to respond in kind, and in moments they had established a working rhythm. *We are a circle,* David thought, *the two halves finally together to form a circle, the symbol of completeness.* But there was no more time for contemplation as Byron's mouth pulled, pulled on his cock, seemingly attempting to swallow him whole, starting with that root. He felt the pressure beginning to build up in his balls, a soreness almost, and he knew it would not be long before he would climax. He sensed in Byron's twitching legs that he was approaching that same point, and so he intensified his efforts. He would like it if they could reach their climaxes together, to let the sperm complete its circle, from body into body, from dust into dust.

David studied the cock in his mouth with Zen contemplation, trying to imagine how that cock must feel, trying to become the cock and the mouth encasing it and the balls below building up their sperm, and the pleasure was easy enough to capture, for Byron was duplicating it on David's own organ. The room seemed to be filled with wet, sliding sounds, like exotic crickets anxious to mate on a hot, spring night.

"Oooohhhhh!" he mumbled around Byron's cock, letting him know with a lover's signal.

Byron's tongue worked ever faster, moving across and down and over and around and around the head. David tensed, waiting, as though listening for some inner voice, and then Byron began fucking his mouth, thrusting his hips back and forth, forcing his cock deeper and deeper down David's throat. David didn't resist. His own cock was already at the back of Byron's throat, and the climax was too near, too near to resist anything, to think of anything, only of . . . release!

"Oh my God!"

He had pulled away, afraid that he might forget and bite, but he had waited long enough, for Byron, too, was climaxing. For a moment they were separated, each suffering the similar agony of pleasure, and then each mouth sought its cock again, sucking gently as the shuddering organs relaxed slowly back into softness.

Later, still lying together, they watched the world wake up through the bedroom window, and David sensed it was time for Byron to go, this time forever.

"Hold me. Just for another minute."

"Yes."

"Send me a copy of the movie."

"I'll send you the only copy. I won't have much use for it. Cops still shoot murderers on sight, you know."

"No, wait. I don't want to be respon . . ."

"Don't worry about it," Byron said, kissing him. "After all, it'll only be the greatest visual art ever created by man, that's all."

"Thank you, at least, for saying 'visual.' "

"Don't think about me, David. Remember this, but don't think about me then. I won't exist then, for you, except in this memory."

"Hold me."

Later still, lying together, Byron touched his shoulder.

"I have to go now, David."

"I don't want to die. What's the point of resurrection if . . ."

"You still have life. Use it!"

"I want more than life. I want . . ."

"Then create it. David, I have to go."

"Alone? Must it always be alone?"

"No, not always."

"No," he admitted grudgingly, "not always."

"Here is a pill, David . . ."

"No."

"I want you to take it, David. You'll go to sleep . . ."

"I will die in that sleep . . ."

"And when you wake up, I'll be gone."

"No."

"It would be easier, David, for both of us."

"Oh, god . . ."

"Kiss me."

"Oh, my god . . ."

The mouths met, warm . . . but the pill came instead, passing from Byron into David, and even knowing it was hemlock, he swallowed.

The season of the hyacinths passed, and the gladiola came to replace them. The weekends came and went, time killed partially with friends, partially with books. One Monday he walked with Goddeux down to the mailbox at the foot of the hill, and found the box inside that he had been waiting for, the film. There were also some bills, and something from his agent. He did not bother looking at them. He ran up the hill again — or he ran when he could, as much as he could — until his heart almost cracked from the strain, and even then he forced himself to walk

fast. Back in the cabin, he ran around like a madman, throwing blankets over the windows for darkness, tracing down the projector, setting it up. Then he was finally ready. He lit a joint and turned on the movie. "Oh, my God!" he said at the first images. "My God!" He repeated it, over and over again, as the vision unfolded before him.

Late that night, when he returned, he burned the movie, knowing full well he would have to destroy it in order to create. Then he went upstairs, uncovered his typewriter, and sat down. He put a piece of paper into the machine, and began to type the first sentence: "It was the season of the hyacinth." Now that circle, too, could be completed. As he wrote, he was able to recapture the odor of the flowers. Once, along toward morning, he believed that he felt Byron's hand touch the back of his neck, in passing.

###

Pictures of Erotic Moments

by Nils Hallbeck

Your eyes are tired, sick and your lips
tired too, serious, full of sorrow, woe
Look! The glass says you are a dying man
If you could be saved to life? Could be
If once you meet a charming boy and he is a
virgin boy and if, by himself, he stops you
saying: Oh, dying man, I love you. Take me!
The odds? Forget it! You are mad. Go on!
Your way, crossed by no lover more, ends
where you will be stopped and fucked by
DEATH. No boy, indeed, no virgin, he!

I remember him, just reaching the orgasm
Furiously, urged by desire, he threw his
body on me, unconscious, in violent coition
movements, ejaculating his seed on my thighs
I remember the intimate, thrilling moments
I fought for my life against a wild beast
caught in his sexstrong, choking embrace
And then, lying on his back, panting for air
the beast was a boy again, moist, warm, soft
I held his swift-pounding heart in my hand
fondling, kissing his neck, his swollen lips
I know, he said, the cock will murder me soon

A Queer Is A Queer Is A Queer

by Louie Crew

Surely it is not surprising that in our literature Gays are stereotyped chiefly as criminals, neurotics, and sinners. Even so late as 1975 most spokespersons for our major institutions (our lawyers, doctors, preachers, and teachers) persist in restricting otherwise whole Gay personhood by variations on these three general stereotypes. Openly Gay students are fairly rigorously denied access to the bar, to the scalpel, to the cloth, and to the podium; and the professionals who declare ourselves Gay after winning our professional qualifications are, by law as well as by consensus, easily disenfranchised, disavowed, disbarred, or otherwise discredited, so anxious are nonGays to see the acceptable world as made in only their own image. After all, you nonGays have the power, and you or your representatives continue to use that power to institutionalize your stereotypes of Gay people.

Any literature which is responsible to the grim realities of the Gay Experience in our hostile and homophobic culture cannot stray very far from these institutionalized stereotypes of Gays as criminals, neurotics, and sinners. It is no accident that Radclyffe Hall wrote about the "well of loneliness" rather than about a "cup of communion." It is no accident that the Gay hillbilly villain in *Deliverance* is a sick rutting animal. It is no accident that the hero of *Tea and Sympathy* as the price for being the hero has to appear to be a nonGay rutting animal at the end of the book. It is no accident that Sister George, for all her humor, is a neurotic predator who must be killed. It is no accident that Geraldine is a witch from whom Christabel is rescued at the last moment into a heterosexual marriage. It is no accident that Baldwin's hero, however nostalgically, abandons Giovanni for a woman whom he loves less. It is no accident that Holden Caulfield is admired more for rejecting Mr. Antolini's touch than he would have been for reciprocating it, even though his inability to reciprocate touch is a large part of the frustration which has him hospitalized at the end of the book. It is no accident that George in Isherwood's *A Single Man* turns his violence inward rather than outward at the oppressor whom he recognizes. It is no accident that either Drury's *Advise and Consent* or Cather's "Paul's Case" ends in suicide. It is no accident that Tennessee Williams is known as the poet of the damned. It is no accident that threatening evil rather than joyful liber-

ation is the pervasive mood when the little boy enters the house at the end of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. It is no accident that Genet celebrates the criminal mind or that the most popular Lesbian book last year was called *Ruby Fruit* Jungle. It is no accident that Proust was sickly, that Gide was ashamed, that Alice B. Tolkas spiritualized and bowdlerized her accounts of her marriage to Gertrude Stein. It is no accident that Mann wrote *Death in Venice* instead of *Fulfillment in Venice* or instead of *Of Such Is The Kingdom Of God*. It is no accident that Paul Mariah focuses heavily on prison experience or that when poet Ellen Marie Bissert talks about "Sharing" the word takes on the hateful reality of her having to share her womanfriend with a man. It is no accident that Mary Renault's more successful books are set in remote times and distant places; and it is no accident that Gordon Merrick's books, trying the same amelioration, but in our time and place, sound like the fantasies that they are. It is no accident that Forster's *Maurice* and Ann Shockley's *Loving Her* have their unconventional-because happy-endings only by ending the books at the beginning of relationships rather than at their full fruition . . . We Gays cannot escape your stereotypes. We really are your criminals, your neurotics, your special sinners. As one of our buttons asserts, "We are those people you warned us against." Gay literature -- whether written by Gays or by nonGays -- does (as it must) reflect these realities very sharply, hence, stereotypically. Otherwise, Gay literature would not be true to the Gay Experience.

When I watched the recent episode of Marcus Welby called "Outrage," in which a man sexually molests a young boy, as a Gay person I was of very mixed minds. On the one hand, I wanted to shout, "Don't tell me about our Gay criminals until you can also tell me about our Gay professionals! Make Welby himself Gay too, and I'll listen to your 'truth' about Gay child molesters!" Then I wondered whether you are prepared really to see Welby himself as Gay, so grave would be the alterations necessary to make him credible. He would have had to lie hundreds of times to get through medical school and even more times to maintain his powerful hospital rank. He would have had to pass as straight, possibly would have had to marry someone whom he loved relatively less than even strangers, and would your cameras have been willing to slip quietly with him to the only places where your society allows him to make warm, human contact with people to whom he is attracted? You simply cannot decriminalize a criminal without changing the law. You simply cannot make people mentally comfortable without changing medical diagnosis. You simply cannot make people "redeemed" or "saved" if you persist in denying them access to the grace of God.

I know a Black man who recently caused great consternation at a white campus when, invited to talk about the Black Experience, he spent his entire hour noting that many Blacks even in days of slavery were fairly well educated and that many drank tea out of a demitasse while

daintily curling their pinkies. Of course, by emphasizing this obscure but literal fact the Black speaker tried to humanize Blacks by redressing the pervasive negative stereotypes; yet the speaker succeeded only in being embarrassingly arch. In sharp contrast is Richard Wright's response in *Native Son,* wherein, instead of saying, "Look how sophisticated a few of us can be if you give us a chance," Wright rather embraces the negative stereotypes to shout, "Yes, my people are criminals, and yes, we will rape your wives if you let us near! Look and learn why!"

Certainly there are a few intelligent sissies who make it without thinking ourselves criminal, neurotic or sinful, a few of us who daintily curl our pinkies in our slavery; and of course these few souls are important. But be not deceived, the vast majority of my people are not like you and for many of us your fears and stereotypes are justified. At the very least hundreds of Gay males can and do marry, if not molest, your daughters, and hundreds of Lesbians can and do marry, if not molest, your sons! We will continue thus and otherwise to criminalize your world until, until . . . must you be told the only better way? . . . Take us off your sick lists; legalize our sexuality on full par with your own; take the Gospel to every creature as you were commissioned.

In teaching a Gay student, a Gay son, or a Gay daughter I would look not so much to find works which reverse or avoid the stereotypes — sick, sinful, criminal — as to find works which reflect them honestly, rigorously. A Gay person will not have much chance of surviving intact as healthy, whole and holy until she or he understands how very stringently this society insists that Gays can never be healthy, whole or holy. As a Gay Christian scholar I could not survive for one week trying to maintain the illusion that my Church really loves me, or of believing that my holy Gay marriage is affirmed or otherwise taken seriously by more than a handful of people, or of imagining that I am listened to as a rational being by more than a few sister and brother oddballs, Gay or nonGay. On rainy nights in Georgia my Black husband and I do not know when the sheriff is coming to take us away for the felony we commit every day, or, more threatening, when the locals will heed their newspaper's published plea either to bring the law down on us or, failing that, to rise up and "stamp it out." I simply must understand, even embrace, nonGay stereotypes of me as a criminal. a neurotic, and a sinner before I can hope to survive them, much less change them. Praised be every literary work which has given these stereotypes visibility.

This paper in a slightly abbreviated form was first presented to the Workshop on Racial and Sexual Stereotypes in Literature at CCCC, St. Louis, March, 1975.

###

GIRLFRIENDS

by L. A. Ritter

They had been the very best of friends all through grade school, and suffered braces and acne together in junior high. And during the period of blooming awareness, discovered "boys" together. Sharon was tall and willowy, and very dark. She had a tomboyish look about her that belied her true interests. Mina was an opposite, short, very petite, very blonde, and very popular with the boys. They were older, now, and both out of school, groping to find their ways in the real world.

Mina had married. He was a dumpy sort of person, with very little brain, but she was pregnant, and he was willing enough to believe he was the father. If truth be known, Mina really didn't know who the father was, nor did she care. Her dearly beloved had taken a job working at an all-night drive-in grocery, and she had to take in kids during the day to help make ends meet. Needless to say, it was not what the voted "Most Likely to Succeed" had expected for herself, and now she looked forward to an endless chain of dirty diapers, unpaid bills, and dull, dull nights.

On the other hand, Sharon hadn't married, and had the misfortune of getting pregnant only once. She'd given it away, and wished she hadn't. Her parents had thought that it was best that she didn't keep it, though, and after weighing out their attitudes, Sharon decided that they would never have let the child be normal if she kept it. She'd taken the glorious job of checker in a five and dime, and had the swollen ankles to prove it.

It was on a hot summer night when Mina's hubby was away at work that the two girlfriends sat at Mina's kitchen table drinking hot tea and discussing how utterly miserable their lives were. Mina remarked that she finally had got the baby to sleep.

"Sleep," Sharon picked up, "I've been having the oddest dreams lately."

"What about?" Mina put a dirty baby bottle into the sink.

"You probably won't believe this," Sharon faltered a little, "but they've been about you and me."

Mina came back to the table and sat down, "Hmn-hmn."

"In bed," she finished flatly.

They both looked at each other, showing no emotion on their faces and not making a sound. Thoughts raced round and round in Mina's head. She'd been having similar dreams, not always with Sharon, but imaginary girls.

"And?"

"I don't know." Sharon studied her cup. "I might like to try it but I don't know who. It would have to be someone that I really

knew well, and felt comfortable with."

"Like me?" Mina took both their cups and calmly carried them to the kitchen sink.

"Yeah, but how would you start?" Sharon turned in her chair and watched Mina run soapy water over the dishes in the sink.

"I don't know. You start off by kissing when you're a man and a woman. I guess you'd start off by kissing when it's two women," Mina shrugged. She turned off the tap, and walked through the dining room towards the hall. "You want to come in here with me? I've got to put sheets on the bed."

"Would you want to try it?" Sharon stood up and followed Mina down the hall and into the bedroom.

"I guess we could. I've sort of been having the same dreams," Mina confessed. "I guess I'm just curious."

Sharon helped Mina to put the sheets on the bed, and then not too subtly turned back the covers. "I guess the first thing we need to do is get undressed."

Mina walked over to the door and turned off the ceiling light. She shut the door, and turned around. Sharon had already taken off her slacks and shirt and was working on the hooks that fastened her French wire cup bra. She stood there and just watched for a moment and then began undoing her own things. Soon they were both standing in the semi-darkness totally nude. Mina went over to the bed and got in. Sharon followed.

The two girls just lay there and looked at one another. Mina asked, "What do we do now?"

Sharon didn't say anything. She just looked at her friend. She reached out her hand, and carefully caressed Mina's breast. Mina followed the initiative, and reached out for Sharon.

They lay in the darkness, touching, feeling, caressing. They explored each other without rules or boundaries, somehow losing their own identities, and ignoring the only part of the body which might have remembered . . . the head, container of the mind.

When it was over, it was like waking from a dream. Brought to consciousness, Mina suddenly became aware of herself, and sprang from the bed, "I think I like boys better."

Sharon watched her go into the bathroom and disappear behind the door. "Yeah, I really didn't get very hot or anything."

They both knew that they would never do it again, but they would never forget. It was something that their curiosity demanded they do, now satisfied. They wouldn't need to be ashamed, but they wouldn't need to repeat. And somehow, they didn't feel unhealthy, or strange because of it. They were just friends.

###

Girlfriends

REVIEW

by William Harrold

Cool Zebras of Light, by Robert Peters. Christopher's Press, 1819 Sycamore Canyon Rd., Santa Barbara, California 93108. 72pp., $2.75.

Throughout his book **Cool Zebras of Light** Robert Peters blends poetry and prose by grouping together several poems, then writing a piece that is half poem/half prose. As he says in "Gingerbread Boy Waits to be Eaten by Big Daddy," "Moments of fulfillment and exhaltation balance the visceral, the ugly and tormented. I want my poems to stand in their own right, the prose giving relief from the intensity of the poems." And he is successful in that the poems are frequently of such high lyrical magnitude that they shut like roses around the bed of love, and the reader, caught inside, needs some time for post-climax relaxation (verbally speaking) before another affair with lines like those in "There is This End for the Night":

it shall ride
like black dawn

meeting itself
east, over the sea.

we feel its breath
and, like it, draw closer
into a doubled
morning rose.

The title poem is a fine experiment with the meta-reality of language. In the short space of ten lines the poet brings us to a level where we are able not only to accept a meta-real experience but enjoy it in a higher state that might be called mind-sex. Peters, knowing that "love has its thunder," focuses on the lover's "fists/ . . . warm/against my ribs," "the musk of love" "between/layers of skin" —

at last
cool zebras of light
are feeding.

Another of the finest poems in the volume is "Transition Poem," printed earlier in Ian Young's **Male Muse**. The poet merges the act of poem-making with the making of love:

You have learned to

sleep against me
my back against your chest.

This poem is easy.

I see that having
is flesh transformed . . .

Even in the simple description of a room, Peters in "Interior" transforms the ordinary nature of furniture by the repetition

in the last line: "a bed a bed." And when he projects human action onto nature, there is no waste. He is like an acrobat who swings out for a perfect catch on the Orion-belt trapeze. In the poem "Insomnia" he describes the dissipation of potential:

> behind this vast overhang
> of clouds, I know, rides
> a full moon wasting itself.

And I cannot resist pointing to the clean-shaven details exhibited in "Fishmouth Poem":

> now, the gills of
> steamed fish bleached
> & crammed into tin . . .
>
> hearing their slick lips
> tearing away. what is
> the end?

The prose sections of the book read like a diary kept by the poet while he and his lover travel through Germany and England, and are noted for their details of locale such as the "wooden Jesus" and "men and women in various stages of decay" at the museum in Cologne. These sections are sometimes weaker when they simply relate ordinary facts about what he and Lee did and how they felt. They are better when he carefully selects the things he describes — but better still when he transforms them into humor, as when Bob protests that Lee is taking the wet corners too fast on the rain-slick road, and Peters says "That's how the young drive. Be patient, Bob." The prose is more effective too when it transcends the usual point of view: "Lee stripped to catch what remained of a weak sun. Tomorrow we leave for London."

Cool Zebras of Light is another significant addition to the career of a poet who has already produced several fine volumes, as well as criticism on Swinburne and John Addington Symonds. His works continue to appear in journals of the quality of **The Antioch Review**, **The New York Quarterly**, **Kayak**, and **Gay Sunshine**. The book is a very comfortable size, designed by Melissa Albers and printed with great care by Gary Albers of Christopher's Books. It includes Holly Wright's cover photo and an excellent sketch of Robert Peters by Don Bachardy, who is continuing to turn out masterpieces. I recommend **Cool Zebras of Light** to all those who have learned to graze on meta-reality.

###

Please WILL U HELP ME?
For I AM HORNY TONITE/ HOT AT MY SUNSET PAD
And I NEED A MAN
Some EARTHY AMERICAN INDIAN STUD
Some SUPERENDOWED LEVI COWBOY
Or even maybe SOMEONE LIKE MYSELF, TALL, SLIM, WHITE, WARM,
WHO ENJOYS FUN – MY COUNTERPART!

Hear my cry COOL BUDDY IN ALASKA
Please LET ME DROP MY JOCKS FOR YOU
And you G.I., TRUCKER, OR AIRLINE GUY
Or just ENCLOSE SHOT OF YOUR HAIRY BUNS
For I DIG TONGUE IN CHEEK ACTION.

You halt me MR PANTS MESSER
Like your pal BEDWETTER, 57, W/m, 180 lbs,
And all who lurk STILL IN DIAPERS AND RUBBER PANTS:
And MR. ROPE HUNGRY (HANDCUFFS),
You are not going to hurt me, even one little bit.

But I WILL ANSWER ALL
Yes all: even you
MR REFINED INTELL., TOGETHER
MR SLENDER SENSITIVE BLACK
MR AH LOVES WHITE CHICKEN
MR SMOKE-A-MUST
MR CONGENIAL FATTIE
MR BLOND MASTER
MR CHOCOLATE GOODIES
MR BAREBOTTOM WOODSHED SPANKING
MR DOUBLE AMPUTEE
MR AM DESPERATE
MR LONELY IN ARKANSAS
MR SLAVE
MR SCAT
MR SHIT
MR LOVE

Cries *

by W. I. Scobie

*From The Advocate, Newspaper of America's Homophile Community.

REVIEW

California Weekend and Other Poems, by Timothy J. Lennox. Available from Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, 15 Christopher St., N.Y., N.Y. 10014. 18 pages. $1.50.

Reviewed by Jacob Stockinger

This first collection by Timothy J. Lennox, who has published single poems in several periodicals, cannot help but bring forth mixed reactions. Without exception, the poems are love lyrics; beyond that one unity, however, they are all quite uneven. At his best, in poems like "fireside," "intruder," and "pacifier," Lennox shows a gift for creating essential poetic units -- lines and images -- that are arresting: "There's deep within me/a youth/who's dead a decade now/but seems not to remember that . . ." and "Snow/ quieted our argument/outside the bar last night." But in other poems the poetic diction is unsure and searching, running the limits from outright clichés to strained originality. There are many details that are certain to entertain the reader and provoke numerous and poignant personal associations. Yet too often the poems seem to be so personal and nostaligic in only an authorial sense that the reader has a difficult time entering their world, however briefly. One is reminded of Gide's remark about the writer's need for narrative distance in his art. When Lennox cultivates such distance, his poetry is moving and offers convincing proof of a talent to be encouraged. Poems like "scapegoat," in which the poet falls into an outdated apostrophe to a "god of love" who turns out to be himself, or "n.e. wind," where a kind of "folk-chic" effect is created by abbreviating participles ("dogs-a-barkin'," "old men readin'," etc.) and by jingle type rhymes, may stand as valid *gay* art. But in the end, their real effect is to sharpen the reader's appetite for the gay *art* that he suspects Lennox is capable of.

###

On 21st Street

by El Gilbert

In the leather bar, three
guys in snake boots stand there shaking,
clothespins hung from their nipples,
custom-made black calf jackets
hanging open
and the look of hunger
protruding.
It is Saturday night.
Smoke rises
in back of the billiard table.
Spontaneous cries
are muffled, gathering pain,
buddyriding time.

Hollywood Gay Pride Carnival

1975

Photo by Daniel Curzon